



Thursday, April 27, 2017

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Blind dementia sufferer swindled out of thousands

CROOKED CLEANER FLEECED VETERAN

REPORT BY JOHN SCOTT

A CROOKED cleaner who fleeced a 93-year-old blind dementia sufferer out of at least £200,000 has been jailed.

Veronica Robinson, who was taken on as an £8.50-an-hour cleaner, was branded an 'unprincipled opportunist' and jailed for five and a half years.

She started work at his Black Country home in August 2013 and isolated the wealthy man from friends and family, allowing her to take control of his money. Her besotted employer's cash paid for a house for her in Halesowen.

The 61-year-old spent £188,000 of his savings on the house while a further £67,000 remains unaccounted for after being withdrawn in cash from his bank accounts during the time she was employed by him.

Robinson, from High Haden Road, Cradley Heath, of previous good character, was convicted by a jury of fraud by abuse of position and attempting to pervert the course of justice.

Opportunism

Judge Barry Berlin told her while passing sentence at Wolverhampton Crown Court: 'You took advantage of your good fortune in meeting a wealthy and vulnerable man, groomed him while abusing your position as his cleaner to swindle him out of his life savings and almost succeeded.'

Robinson was hungry for cash from the moment she arrived back in this country in late 2011 after spending 37 years in Australia. She lived for a short time with her sister before finding rented accommodation of her own, claiming hundreds of pounds worth of housing benefit to which she was not entitled after failing to declare £54,000 savings.

Sandwell Council officials discovered her hidden wealth and halted the payments in December 2013, shortly after she started her the cleaning job. The locks on the property were changed as mother of two Robinson took him on trips to the bank dubbed 'Bonnie and Clyde' runs but the joke turned sour as withdrawals from his accounts soared from £1,000 to almost £6,000 a month.

He had a £1,500-a-month pension, more than £300,000 savings and an arrangement where his current account was automatically boosted from savings when it fell below £2,000 in credit.

Mercedes-driving Robinson paid £3,500 cash into one of her bank accounts in five months.

Her besotted employer, a war veteran, bought her a £1,000 brooch, gave her a £10,000 'loan', took her out for meals and then bought her an £188,000 house in Beecher Street, Halesowen into which she moved in January 2015.

SHELLING OUT TO SPRUCE UP TOWN CORNER



Cleaning up the flower beds on Shell Corner in Halesowen are councillors Karen Shakespeare, Hilary Bills and Stuart Henley

A CAMPAIGN group completed their latest project to spruce up a Black Country town centre.

Halesowen North ward councillors Hilary Bills, Stuart Henley and Karen Shakespeare rolled up their sleeves to tackle weeds in planters in Shell Corner.

The Shell Corner Partnership group consists of the three wards councillors and reverend Mike Sermon, of St Paul's Church in Blackheath.

Councillor Stuart Henley said: 'The weeding session went well. We planted some little

sapling bushes and cut out some weeds. A local bloke will also provide some chippings to clear up the planter.'

The planters are the corner of Long Lane and Maple Road. Councillor Henley highlighted that it was important to make the area look attractive as it helps footfall in the town. The group regularly hold meetings about how to improve the community of Halesowen.

Councillor Hilary Bills, who is also cabinet member for environmental services, said: 'The four of us meet regularly to discuss ideas, and we also look after the island in

Shell Corner. The aim of the weeding session is to make the shopping area look tidy.'

The group welcomes the help of the public in participating with community projects.

Councillor Bills said: 'We are always on the lookout for help from the community.'

Councillor Henley added: 'We have a lot of positive feedback (regarding the weeding session) from local businesses to say how much better the planters look.'

'But we are still on the lookout for people (who can help out).' Search for 'Shell Corner Partnership' on Facebook.

COMPENSATION

£350,000 in payouts for pothole damage

COMPENSATION payments of almost £350,000 have been paid out because of damage caused by potholes in the last four years – with one driver alone receiving more than £4,600, new figures from a Freedom of Information request have revealed.

Problem roads around the county include Envile Common Road in South Staffordshire and Keepers Lane in Codsall.

The single highest payout was after a collision with a pothole at the junction of Somerset Road and Kent Road in Stafford.

• Full story – Page 4

PLAYGROUND

Vandal attack targets go-karts

VANDALS broke into an adventure playground in Dudley and caused thousands of pounds worth of damage.

Staff at the Sycamore Adventure youth centre found on Monday morning that an outdoor storage cupboard had been broken into and all 15 of its go-karts left strewn all over the site.

One, which was one of four bought by the Dudley Council-owned centre following a grant from Comic Relief, was damaged beyond repair, while several others were also damaged.

UKIP

MEP Carver quits in row over burkas

JAMES Carver has quit as UKIP's foreign and Commonwealth affairs spokesman in protest against the party's call for a burka ban.

The West Midlands MEP said he has resigned his position 'with deep regret' as he believes UKIP's policy banning face coverings undermines his 'desire to represent all communities within the West Midlands'. 'No-one has the right to dictate what people should wear,' he said.

He said it was only reasonable when facial identification was needed such as at passport controls, or in a bank, then it is perfectly reasonable to order the removal.

INSIDE

PM IN BATTLE CRY ON REGION



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Car parking concerns at busy station

PARKING problems at Coseley railway station are to get worse as it gets 'busier than ever', it has been claimed.

Residents and ward councillor Susan Ridney have raised concerns over the lack of spaces for vehicles at the station.

Nearby Tipton rail station will more than double in size after expansion plans were given the green light last month - meaning 100 new spaces to ease congestion.

Following a survey, it was found that the station was full by 8.30am on most days.

However, Coseley train station, which is used regularly by commuters to get to Birmingham and

beyond, is 'busier than ever', according to Councillor Ridney.

She said: "The train station has always been busy but it's getting busier than ever now."

"People are using trains more which I applaud, but I have a responsibility which means I need to listen to residents' concerns and they are about the lack of parking."

"Commuters are parking on streets, the car parks in Roseville for shoppers and on an old derelict pub because the two car parks are full."

The station currently has 97 spaces and five blue badge spaces.

However, the body responsible for the car park

urged commuters to park 'responsibly' and encouraged people to get to the station by other means.

Mark Langford, Transport for West Midlands spokesman, said: "Park and ride is a very popular scheme and results in many car parks being full by 8am."

"Motorists have a big part to play in giving themselves enough time to get a space at their chosen station, and while we do not control what happens outside of our car parks, we strongly encourage anyone unable to get a space to park responsibly."

"They could ask themselves if they really need to drive to the station as users living less than a mile away could catch the bus, cycle or walk."

Ceremony of thanks after scheme wins major award

A VOLUNTARY counselling scheme that helps more than 100 children and young people a week has been honoured with a prestigious Queen's Award for Voluntary Service.

The What? Centre provides one-to-one therapeutic counselling and advice services for young people, working with more than 120 young people a week at its centre based in Stourbridge.

The award is the highest a voluntary group can receive in the UK and a lavish thank you ceremony was attended by Deputy Lord Lieutenant Viv Astling OBE at Himley Hall.

Julie Duffy, chief officer for 30 years at the centre, spoke of her pride at receiving the award.

She said: "More than 40 of our volunteers attended the event that have worked with us for a long time. It was really a moment to be proud of."

"Everyone said that they had been impacted from hearing the work that the centre does and mental health has really been in the spotlight lately."

The What? Centre is one of 193 charities, social enterprises and voluntary groups to receive the prestigious award this year.

The number of awards given to groups this year is slightly higher than last year, showing that the voluntary sector is thriving and full of innovative ideas to tackle community challenges.

Julie continued: "This award is for all of the volunteers who have counselled or supported young people at any time during these 30 years."

Free parking trial to get under way

A FREE parking trial in an effort to boost trade will get under way on Monday.

Shoppers visiting Dudley Council car parks in Sedgley, Dudley, Brierley Hill and Halesowen can enjoy up to two hours of free parking through to July 2.

People who want to take advantage of the trial will need to print and display a free parking ticket from the machines already in place.

Normal charges will be in place for people parking for longer than two hours and return is prohibited within three hours of leaving.

Councillor Hilary Bills said: "The intention is to encourage people to visit the shopping areas across the borough. We're trying to work out if car parking attracts people into the towns."

Cricket scheme to encourage young

A NEW cricket programme is in place to encourage more youngsters aged five to eight to play the game.

The All Stars Cricket Scheme is available at Coseley Cricket Club on Mondays from 6.30pm until 7.30pm. For more information, visit allstarscricket.co.uk.

Thousands join castle's St George's celebrations



Robert Aston, from Coseley, dresses for the St George's Day celebration at Dudley Castle



Kevin Simpson and Lizzie Fotheringham



An archer lines up his shot during the event



It was great fun for children



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Scheme for waste site thrown out by council

COUNCIL chiefs have rejected plans for a 'waste transfer station' over fears it could pollute a nearby river and wildlife.

The application for Bromley Street, in Lye, would have seen the storage of skips, plant and shipping containers including a weighbridge.

A bunker would have been used for the storage of soil, hardcore and green waste alongside the existing main building being used as the drop off, transfer and sorting area.

It comes as letters of concern were received from neighbours fearing it would be unsafe and cause an increase in vermin. The plans were submitted two years ago.

The plans were refused because the site could potentially pollute the water of the nearby River Stour, a report published by Dudley Council said.

The report said: "The proposed use as a waste transfer station is considered to have the potential to cause harm to the adjoining water course due to the inherent nature of the operation."

Council planners noted that there were no plans outlined as to how surface drainage would be provided or controlled.

Phil Jones and Richard Huggins, who own A&PJ Steels, said in a letter: "We have experienced a substantial increase in vermin in the past two years."

They also claimed the road would not be able to cope with the increased traffic to the site.

UKIP leader will not enter MP race

THE leader of Dudley UKIP group Paul Brothwood has announced that he will not be standing as a candidate in the General Election.

It comes as Councillor Brothwood announced in recent weeks that he would no longer support Labour, which controls the local authority but does not have an overall majority.

He is now set for talks with the Conservative group, the second biggest party at the council house, about a change in leadership.

In a statement released yesterday, Councillor Brothwood said: "As UKIP group leader I have a duty to the 300,000 residents of the entire borough to ensure significant progress is made at the council. I have to set aside my own personal ambition."

Bananarama in Brum reunion gig

Bananarama are reuniting for the first time since 1988 and will play Birmingham's Barclaycard Arena on November 23.

Sara Dallin led the band which formed in 1979.

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Former police chief facing case probe



Former chief constable Chris Sims

A FORMER West Midlands and Staffordshire Chief Constable is facing possible investigation over the handling of an historical child sex abuse case.

The complaint against Chris Sims centres on why a meeting between him and alleged victims of abuse at Tettenhall College in Wolverhampton never took place – despite a request by then-Home Secretary Theresa May.

The Office of the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner David Jamieson said it had received a complaint from alleged victims An-

drew Wood and Mark Shelton. It is understood another police force is to be asked to look into the complaint, but the pair have also been offered a meeting with current Chief Constable Dave Thompson and a representative of Mr Jamieson's office.

Mr Wood, originally of Wombourne, and Mr Shelton, of Shifnal, were expecting a meeting with Mr Sims in early 2015 to discuss problems with their case. It followed an intervention by Mrs May in February of that year.

At the time, prosecutors were deliberating whether to bring charges

against ex-Tettenhall College head Colin Cope after video footage emerged showing him driving, carrying a table and climbing stairs eight months after being too sick to stand trial. He was charged with 11 offences on boys at the Wolverhampton school. He denied any wrongdoing.

Mr Wood and Mr Shelton were among five ex-pupils paid a total of £129,000 in an out-of-court settlement in 2012 by the boarding school. The school did not admit liability. Cope died aged 84 in March 2015.

Mr Sims declined to comment.

Charity box conwoman spared prison by court

A CONWOMAN posed as a charity worker to trick people into handing over collection tins.

Claire Kierczek, of Dudley, was spared prison despite having a similar conviction on her record and being subject to a suspended prison sentence at the time.

She had denied two charges of fraud, but was found guilty by magistrates who committed her to Warwick Crown Court to be sentenced.

The 32-year-old, of Buffery Road, was given a 12-month jail term suspended for two years.

She was ordered to take part in a drug rehabilitation programme, made subject to a curfew for six months, and fined £1 for breaching a suspended sentence imposed at Wolverhampton Crown Court last year.

Mr Nicholas Smith, prosecuting, said that in November Kierczek was at Asda in Jubilee Crescent, Coventry, posing as a representative of the Royal British Legion.

She showed staff fake ID saying she was there to collect charity boxes. Kierczek took two boxes, one a British Legion box with an estimated £200 in it, and left empty ones.

Drug

CCTV recordings were later seized by police from which she was identified. But by then she had struck again, this time at the Coventry Trophy Centre in Burnaby Road, Coventry.

At the time Kierczek was subject to a 12-month community order imposed by Birmingham magistrates for a similar offence in November 2015 of posing as an employee to steal charity boxes. Then at Wolverhampton in March last year, for converting criminal property by selling a camera that had been stolen in a burglary, she had been given the two-month suspended sentence.

Recorder Christopher Donnellan QC said: "It is mean. It justifies custody. But if she has a drug problem and it is on-going, I am minded to follow the recommendation in the pre-sentence report. I am going to give her a chance to sort out the heroin problem."

Sentencing Kierczek and ordering her to pay £50 to the Air Ambulance and £75 to the British Legion, he told her: "People who give to charities in boxes in shops are often people giving small amounts because that is all they can afford to give. It is often those small amounts that make big differences to charities."

"This is your last chance, and I hope that you take it."

This will go towards their am-

bitious anniversary appeal to raise £800,000 for a new separate

outdoor space for the zoo's much-loved great apes.

Marketing manager, Andrea Hales, said: "Our anniversary is fast approaching and we're looking forward to marking DZG's past 80 years, celebrating our present and fundraising for our future projects."

"We're encouraging our sup-

porters to join in the fun and dress in clothing from the zoo's opening

era – the 1930s and 1940s – or in fancy dress and then join us for a party in the castle courtyard during the afternoon."

The walk starts at 11am and registration costs £6 per adult and £3 per child aged between three and 15, which includes zoo admission.

Everyone is encouraged to raise at least £50, with every penny put towards the new enclosure.

To register call 01384 215313.

Take Walk on Wild Side for milestone



Zoo staff Sally Skinner, Sam Grove and Lucy Musgrove get ready to celebrate the zoo's 80th birthday

NEWS IN BRIEF

Goldie to shine at Civic Hall gig

Walsall-born Goldie will perform in Wolverhampton this year, it has been announced.

The star, aged 51, will play with the Heritage Orchestra at the Civic Hall on November 23. He will also perform at MADE Festival in Birmingham on July 29.

Speaking ahead of his Journey Man tour, Goldie – who spent much of his youth growing up in Wolverhampton – said: "This will be one of a kind, a culmination of everything past, present and future in my music, like it has never been heard before, live."

Alert about men asking for money

POLICE have issued a warning after reports of men knocking on doors asking for food and money.

Officers have sent out the alert after the men were reported calling in the Low Hill area of Wolverhampton.

The two men asked those who answered to give them food and money. The warning said: "Beware, bogus callers are operating in this area. Don't be their next victim." Those concerned are advised to "stop" before they answer the door, and think "am I expecting anybody" then "secure the bar or chain before opening the door."

Health staff are on award shortlist

Three staff members from a Black Country NHS trust have been shortlisted for a national award.

Sarah Clarke, Victoria Perry and Kate O'Connor from the Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust have been nominated in the educator-of-the-year category in the Student Nursing Times Awards.

Their award entry included testimonials about their work from students and colleagues. The winners will be announced in London.

Bidding now open in mayor charity auction

A BLACK Country mayor has launched a charity auction – with 38 items up for grabs.

The Mayor of Wolverhampton Councillor Barry Findlay announced the start of the online auction yesterday. On offer in the auction is a weekend stay at a luxury spa hotel with an off-road Land Rover driving experience, donated by Jaguar Land Rover.

To bid, visit wolverhampton.gov.uk/mayoral and follow the link to the auction page.

Clean-up to shut street

PEDMORE Lane in Stourbridge will be closed from Gauden Road to the borough boundary to enable workers to carry out street cleaning. It will be shut on Sunday, May 7, from 6am through to 1pm. Access to frontages will be maintained where it is safe to do so.

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45pc increase in temp vacancies

DEMAND for temporary professionals in the West Midlands has risen by 45 per cent in the year to March, according to the Association of Professional Staffing Companies.

The data, provided by recruitment software company, Innovantage, revealed that in addition to a rise in temporary roles, permanent vacancies also experienced an increase, rising 18 per cent for the year.

Demand for professionals rose notably across sectors including IT and media, which recorded uplifts of 38 per cent and 14 per cent respectively.

Charity steps up in bowel cancer fight

A POLL commissioned by Bowel Cancer UK's Step up for 30 fundraising challenge has revealed 64 per cent of adults living in the Midlands were not aware a lack of regular physical activity increased the risk of bowel cancer.

Research shows regularly taking part in 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity, such as cycling or fast walking every week, can decrease your risk by as much as 12 per cent.

A recent survey revealed more than 20 million people in the UK did not reach or exceed the minimum target. For more information, log on at www.bowelcanceruk.org.uk/stepupfor30/

House woes having an impact on health

MORE than one in four adults in the West Midlands suffer mental health issues due to housing problems.

The report from Shelter and ComRes shows 28 per cent have experienced problems including long-term stress, anxiety and depression due to a housing problem.

Anyone struggling with bad housing and homelessness in the West Midlands can contact Shelter Birmingham on 0344 5151800.

Step up to the bar and raise funds for hospice

A HOSPICE is organising a community event on the canal network, which will take supporters on a walking tour of scenic surroundings.

There are four walks available, which are all taking place on May 21 in aid of Mary Stevens Hospice.

The walks will coincide with the inspirational 125-mile walk being taken on the same weekend by a group of hospice supporters, who will be raising money for the charity for walking for 56 hours without sleep or rest.

All four walks will end at The Maverick at the bottom of Bretell Lane, Amblecote, and the pub will be welcoming walkers throughout the day, before a big end-of-walk celebration at 8pm, to welcome home the team walking the 125 miles.

Staggered

The walks will be at staggered starts throughout the day, with a 24-mile walk from Bridgnorth starting at 8am, a 15-mile walk from Stourport Basin starting at 10am, a nine-mile walk from The Lock at Wolverley starting at 12pm and a 4.5-mile walk from The Vine at Kinver at 2pm.

There will be numerous checkpoints along the route, and the hospice is appealing for anyone who would like to volunteer their time to man those checkpoints on the day to email laura@mshfundraising.co.uk.

Laura Millard, community engagement officer, Mary Stevens Hospice Group, said: "We're privileged in this area to have a gorgeous canal network right on our doorstep."

Visit www.marystevenshospice.co.uk/event/charity-canal-walk.

PM's battle cry during visit to Black Country

THE importance of the Black Country in the forthcoming General Election was highlighted this week with Theresa May heading to Dudley to campaign.

Only days after announcing the snap election the Prime Minister arrived at the heart of the Black Country which she described as a 'very important battleground'.

Her comments come as the Conservatives look to snatch seats away from Jeremy Corbyn's Labour in Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton at the election on June 8.

The Tories have earmarked Walsall North, Dudley North and Wolverhampton South West as key targets.

Speaking at Netherton Conservative Club at the weekend, Mrs May said: "The Black Country is very important and is going to be a very important battleground for the next election."

"Every vote that is cast here is going to be important for the future of our country. It will be a vote for a stronger Britain in the future."

Taxes

Dudley South MP Mike Wood said: "This visit shows that she is determined to win not only in Dudley South but also others seats in the area."

"Dudley North, Walsall North, Wolverhampton South West - these are all seats Conservatives will be fighting extremely hard for."

Earlier the Prime Minister had been out campaigning around Alderdale Avenue in Sedgley.

The street is in Dudley North, which Labour MP Ian Austin fought hard to defend at the last election. In 2010 he had a majority of just 1.1 per cent.

Alderdale Avenue is also on the border of Wolverhampton South West, which has swung between the main parties in the past two elections. Labour had just a two per cent majority at the last general election and the Conservatives are hopeful of



Theresa May gives a speech at Netherton Conservative Club

overturning that, especially after current MP Rob Marris announced last week he would not be seeking re-election.

During the visit the Prime Minister again refused to rule out the possibility raising taxes but insisted the Conservatives remain the party of 'lower taxes'.

The controversial prospect, believed to be the work of Chancellor Phillip Hammond, has seen the

Tories face a setback in the polls. Mr Hammond has hinted he would like to drop the promise of no tax rises because it restricts his options for dealing with Brexit.

Following the news, a Survation poll put the Conservatives on 40 per cent, followed by Labour on 29 per cent and the Lib Dems and Ukip on 11 per cent each.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Weeds tackled in area spruce-up

A campaign group completed its latest project to spruce up a Black Country town centre.

Halesowen North councillors Hilary Bills, Stuart Henley and Karen Shakespeare rolled up their sleeves to tackle weeds in planters in Shell Corner.

They form the Shell Corner Partnership group together with Reverend Mike Sermon, of St Paul's Church in Blackheath.

Councillor Stuart Henley said: "The weeding session went well. We planting some little sapling bushes and cut out some weeds."

Rival moves to buy iconic carpets firm

A KIDDERMINSTER carpets firm has bought a local rival, which is one of the country's oldest and most prestigious independent manufacturers.

Brockway Carpets (Holdings)'s acquisition of the Grosvenor Wilton Company Limited, heralds a new era for the historic brand.

The deal sees Brockway purchase the trade and assets of Grosvenor Wilton, which has created the finest Wilton and bespoke carpets since 1790 for the world's most historic palaces, stately homes, public buildings and private residences.

School's Race for Life

A CHARITY race will be held at a secondary school in a Black Country borough tomorrow.

Pupils at Summerhill School, Lodge Lane, Kingswinford, are taking part in their own Race for Life fundraiser from 4pm. They hope to raise more than £4,000 for Cancer Research UK.

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Doormat bags are not that charitable

A COLLECTION bag with a big logo for a cancer charity dropped on the doormat a couple of weeks ago. Having long been a sceptic about the organisations which carry out these collections, I put it back on the doorstep straight away. And despite the bag saying it would be collected the following Thursday, you will not be too surprised to find that it is still in my possession.

Anyway, sick of the sight of the thing, I decided to take a closer look. The small print on the back revealed it was not from a charity at all, but a private company which makes donations from its revenue towards the charity featured boldly on the front.

A bit more digging around reveals the same company has twice carried out unlicensed – and therefore illegal – collections in Bolton. It has also been stripped of its licence to operate in Torfaen, Monmouthshire, after donating just £12.50 to charity from a collection worth more than £250. That is a pitiful five per cent.

If I have any used clothes, jewellery or books that I want to give to charity, I think I will be taking them to my local charity shop in future.

□ □ □

THE marketing team for nasty American lager brand Budweiser has caused a bit of controversy with its latest publicity stunt, which saw staff roll up in a 4x4 and start handing out cans of Bud Light to vagrants in the street.

I guess that's what they call knowing your market.

□ □ □

MEANWHILE, down in the Big Smoke a somewhat disgruntled electrician returned a burger he bought from McDonald's, claiming somebody had already taken a bite out of it.

The burger chain has investigated closed-circuit television footage, and says it is a mystery how it happened.

But it does remind me of the time that I bought some pork scratching from a rather down-at-heels corner shop in the Black Country, only to find they had already been opened.

Returning, somewhat unhappily to the shop, I explained to the assistant what had happened. Her reply?

"It'll save yo openin' em, wo' it?"

□ □ □

THERE are some rather strange special offers on at the W H Smith branch at Heathrow Airport at the moment. One promotion offers 48 Cadbury's Flakes for £45, there is a similar deal on Kit-Kats, while you can also get 24 Bounties for £22. Doesn't strike me as particularly good value, but you always pay through the nose at airports.

I bet whoever buys them will end up sat next to me.

Remember warning on the unexpected



Theresa May – will she return with a bigger Conservative majority?



Liz Truss announces 'fast track' system to remove foreign deportation dodgers



President Erdogan – success in referendum in Turkey means he can rule as sultan

Election: We May all be surprised

THE BEST OF PETER RHODES



WE ALL know what ought to happen. If you believe the polls and rely on past experience, Theresa May will be returned after the General Election with a bigger Conservative majority. Labour will be stumped and Jeremy Corbyn will be sacked. But these are not normal times and the old rules may no longer apply. So I would not put a large bet on any of the above predictions coming true. And we could do worse in the coming weeks than remember Harold Macmillan's warning of the unexpected things that can upset every plan: "Events, dear boy, events."

JUSTICE Secretary Liz Truss has announced a new "fast track" system to remove foreign deportation dodgers within 25 days of their claims being rejected. We'll believe that when we see it, thanks.

"HUMANITY is destined for eternity, and death is the means by which we reach that joyful beginning," declared an archbishop on Radio Four's Prayer for the Day. If clerics are to be allowed to broadcast such claims, they should at least be obliged to carry the caveat that professional psychics and mediums are forced to display by law: "For entertainment purposes only."

SOME pundits say President Erdogan's success in the referendum in Turkey will give him enough power to rule as a 21st century sultan. This is bad news for his wife Emine who will, of course, become a sultana. But maybe, as his nation's current leader, this is Erdogan's raisin d'être. That's enough dried-fruit nonsense.

I WAS walking down a street the other day, clocking the cars on the drives, and realised to my surprise that more than half of them were diesels. So quite why the proposed diesel-scrap scheme will work is anyone's guess. Figures of up to £2,000 have been ban-

died about for vehicles more than 10 years old, on condition you buy a cleaner non-diesel car. But who in their right mind would willingly take that sum in exchange for, say, a 2007 Range Rover which still has a book value of £10,000 or more? And can anyone guarantee that this scheme will not be hijacked by Britain's thriving car-crime industry? The theory is that tens of thousands of perfectly sound diesel vehicles will be taken off the road and crushed. But how many will be spirited away in shipping containers, to carry on polluting in some other far smoggier corner of the Third World? Whitehall's bean counters are said to be doing the sums. So, too, I bet are the ungodly.

THE world's oldest person, Emma Morana, has died aged 117 in northern Italy. These so-called supercentenarians rarely agree on the reasons for their long lives. One will advocate being teetotal while another will swear by a daily double whisky. One will praise chocolate but another will say it's all due to pickled shark meat or yak yoghurt. Mrs Morana attributed her great age to her family's genes, two raw eggs a day and chucking out her abusive husband in 1938. Take your pick.

THE usual legion of instant experts has been queuing up on social media to assure us that North Korea's missiles which rumbled through Pyongyang last week are not missiles at all but an assortment of plastic and plywood models. See? You can tell by the wonky warheads. One Daily Telegraph reader claims he saw a similar parade in North Korea some years ago and

the "missiles" were actually made of wood. Now, this may be ringing a bell with some older readers. Back in the 1930s, before the Second World War, one of the most popular urban myths concerned a friend of friend who had been on a cycling holiday in Germany and came across a military exercise. And guess what? The German "tanks" were no such thing. They were just cars covered with hardboard sheets to look like tanks, with drainpipes for guns. It's just Adolf pulling the wool over our eyes, right? A couple of years later, thousands of Adolf's tanks, with real armour and real guns, swept the British Army aside and conquered France in a matter of weeks.

IF you believe it is possible to knock somebody out with a cricket bat for just a few minutes, rather than killing or merely stunning them, and if you also believe that a young, terrified and drunken teenager can be forced to rape an unconscious woman against his will, then you presumably think the finale of Broadchurch (ITV) was brilliant. The rest of us acknowledge that some of the acting was excellent. But the plot? Absolute piffle.

LAST words on our recent trip to Cornwall. However they may be marketed, the Lost Gardens of Heligan are not all that lost. It only took us 20 minutes to find them.

LIKEWISE, the 'Lost Valley' within the Lost Gardens was remarkably easy to locate. You just buy the map at the ticket office and follow it to the place marked 'Lost Valley'. I may be missing something.

OUR changing language. A kerflaver, invented accidentally by a pal at the weekend, is a cross between a kerfuffle and a palaver. It's a bit like a palfuffe.

TALKING POINT



Long and winding road is part of holiday

TAKE a look at this family enjoying their ideal holiday, free from the strains of everyday life. There's the children, itching to get onto that golden beach, then there's Mom, telling them to not go too far into the sea, and what about Dad? Well, he's quite happy reading his newspaper, thank you very much.

It's a delightful scene, and one which thousands of families will be replicating this summer (all right, Dad will probably be tapping away at his smartphone apps, but you get the picture). And a picture it most definitely is, because this family doesn't exist. They are actually on a poster above the table where I'm enjoying a pint and a bite to eat in a pub during a well-earned week's holiday.

The poster is a reprint of a British Railways advert from many years ago, in the days when travelling by train to your chosen resort was full of sunny promise.

These days, the station being advertised no longer exists, the site now obliterated by a modern housing development. In fact, the line isn't there either, with little evidence of there ever having been a rail service in that part of the world.

Fast forward to the hectic pace of the 21st Century and far from being part of the holiday, the journey to any holiday destination is merely a means to an end, the aim being to get along the motorway and A-roads in the fastest time possible, not forgetting a break at the services, of course.

However, there can be an enforced treat in store when you least expect it. In my particular case, the motorway was closed, in both directions, due to a lorry fire, necessitating a lengthy detour to get round the blockage. There was nothing else for it but to look for a route that ran roughly parallel with the motorway . . . which was where the overlooked delights of this island we call Great Britain began to reveal themselves.

Yes, it was a long and winding road with countless irritants such as traffic lights, speed limits, and queues to get through bottlenecks, but it soon started to create an idea of what going on holiday by car used to be like. It wouldn't have surprised me to see a friendly bobbie or two waving cheerfully to passing motorists.

The scenery was better for a start, and some of the towns and villages looked as if they actually might be a good choice for a holiday themselves. But in the spring sunshine, the overall impression was that this was where the holiday really started, adding as it did to the mounting expectation.

That family in the BR poster would have approved of this leisurely diversion. I just hope Dad could stay calm in the face of cries of "Are we nearly there, yet?" coming from the back seat.

Wherever you go, and however you choose to get there, remember to make the most of every minute!

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Has council completely lost the plot?

HAVE Dudley council lost the plot?

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After protests the council did a U-turn. Then we had closing and demolishing three leisure centres and building two new ones.

It was said it would be cheaper to do this. Guess what, another U-turn after protests from the people that use them.

Then we have the suggestion of moving the council refuse tip in Stourbridge to Brockmoor.

Again it was said it would be cheaper to them. Bearing in mind the coun-

We had a long wait for the vote

THOSE of us who voted out in 1975 had to wait 41 years for a second EU referendum, so by my calculations die-hard remainers calling for a third must be patient until 2057. Now they know how we felt back in those bad old days.

Those who fear a 'hard-Brexit' are either too young or choose not to remember the turmoil of our hard entry into the EEC in 1973 when we were dragged in with no referendum. A few remainers are so bitter that they actually relish the prospect of the EU giving Britain a severe kicking.

Perhaps they would be happier relocating to the continent and cuddling up to their federalist mates than staying to suffer the ignominy of living among Brexiteers.

The European Commission claim they have no wish to punish the UK. They have done very little else since the day we joined.

BOB MONTROSE
Sedgley

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POST

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Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES

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Letters should be brief and MUST include name, address and telephone number. The Editor reserves the right to condense letters.

Code of Practice: Our policy is to correct errors as soon as we can. The Chronicles adhere to the Editors' Code of Practice, which can be seen at

Check where MPs' donations come from

WE live in a democracy in which we elect a person to be our representative in Parliament, one man, one vote, but does it really work like that?

The elected MP will proclaim unremitting zeal in the service of his constituents but will often put party, career and other influences first.

We read of lobbying companies who are retained by vested interests to solicit the help of MPs in promoting their own agendas. We read of MPs receiving donations of half-a-million pounds or £10,000 on a half day a week job that pays £150,000; are we really to believe that these donors expect nothing in return?

Two old maxims spring to mind, 'no man can serve two masters' and 'he who pays the piper calls the tune'.

BRIAN OSBORNE

Dudley

My advice: You must earn vote

SOMETIME back in the dark ages, Thatcher hired an advertising agency to help her win the election.

They did this by running one of the most negative campaigns to date. Since those days we have had numerous elections in which all parties now campaign in the most negative way.

This culminated in the EU referendum, in which both sides utilised tactics that included practically every negative device known to mankind. These tactics are still being employed today by several MPs.

These MPs still have not noticed that there has now been a major change in politics. No longer are the electorate prepared to sit back and accept the lies and deceit of self-interested politicians. Too many promises have been broken, too many lies have been told.

My advice to all candidates is this: if you want my vote, you have to earn it.

Chris Jones
Brierley Hill

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Sun shines on prize triathletes

THE sun shone on Wombourne on Sunday for the Black Country Triathletes first sprint triathlon of the season which saw more than 250 athletes take on the 400m swim, 20km bike and 5k run.

Those that had an early start had a bit of a cold transition from the pool to the bike, after cycling up to Six Ashes from Ounsdale Leisure Centre, were well warmed up and there were lots of personal bests.

Overall 1st Male was Aaron Crinnian in 00:57:11 and 1st Female Lauren Evans in 01:04:34, from BCT. The new King of the Mountain Category sponsored by Midland Investment Agency was won by Ben Monkton from BCT and Kate Miller from Warley Wasps.

Black Country Triathlon athletes took a number of the prizes. Ben Monkton was 2nd in 00:57:45 and Dave Nash 3rd in 00:59:19.

Author's talk on new novel

AN author from the Black Country has spoken of her pride ahead of hosting a talk at her local library.

Briony Marshall is visiting Sedgley Library on May 3 to give a speech about her debut novel.

The 26 year old said: "I'm very excited to be giving a talk at my local library as the place holds many memories for me." To book call 01384 812790.

TOWNS AND VILLAGES

Finalists tested before Miss Black Country final

THE judging for who will be the next Miss Black Country has got underway with the finalists being put through their paces ahead of this weekend's final.

The 14 finalists had to tackle the sports round as well as a Black Country quiz when they met in Dudley on Sunday.

Although some preliminary judging has taken place, the final stage of judging will be done this Sunday when a winner will also be crowned.

Last Sunday the group met at the Copthorne Hotel in Brierley Hill for the first stage of judging.

They were met by Miss England regional director Rachael Barker before meeting the judges, including last year's Miss Wolverhampton Faye Campbell, Miss United Kingdom 1996 Rachael Butler and Miss Charity England 2016 Laura Morgan.

The finalists were put to the test in an intellect round before a quiz about the Black Country and a modelling round.

Finally the ladies were taken over to Pure Gym in Brierley Hill to tackle the sport round. With the help of personal trainers the finalists were put through their paces with a variety of squats, lunges and crunches.

By Jack Avery



Lin-up of finalists as they prepare for the Miss Black Country competition

Evening of songs from big shows

A BLACK Country theatre group has announced details of its next performance.

Brierley Hill Musical Theatre Company is performing a selection of musical pieces from stage and screen at Holy Trinity Church, Wordsley, on Saturday.

The concert, A Grand Night for Singing, will involve music from well-known musicals such as My Fair Lady, Jersey Boys, Les Misérables, Kiss Me Kate, Sister Act and Starlight Express.

The concert is part of the company's 70th anniversary celebrations, which will include a production of My Fair Lady at Brierley Hill Civic Hall in October.

Tickets are £8 each, with the performance starting at 7.30pm.

Call 0345 658 8095 to book tickets.

Alert after chip pan fire

RESIDENTS across the Black Country are being reminded not to leave chip pans unattended after a kitchen fire.

Dudley fire station issued the reminder after attending a kitchen fire on Duke Street in Upper Gornal on Saturday night.

The damage to the house is unknown however it is not thought to be severe. The woman was uninjured.

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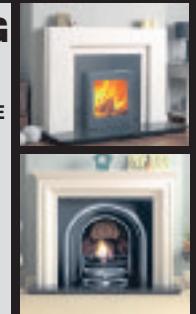
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Inspirational Grace pens song on cancer battle

AN inspirational singer from the Black Country who is nearing the end of her treatment for an aggressive form of cancer has recorded a song about her battle with the disease.

In May last year, Grace Nkounkou-Issombe, 24, and husband Ambrose Ogbechie had just welcomed their first child Austin into the world when Grace started to have difficulty walking.

In July, the results of a biopsy on a lump on her right femur, previously diagnosed as benign, found osteosarcoma, a rare form of bone cancer, and treatment started immediately at Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham.

Decision

But in December, Grace made the difficult decision to have her leg amputated, as the chemotherapy wasn't proving as effective as hoped. Thankfully the most intensive part of her chemotherapy and other treatment is now over, and with the help of physiotherapists and a prosthetic, Grace is hoping to learn to walk again this year, while completing the rest of her treatment.

Throughout her ordeal, support for Grace and her family has been available from cancer support charity CLIC Sargent.

The charity works with young patients aged up to 25 and their families, and has an independent team based at the QE providing financial and emotional support to young people like Grace.

CLIC Sargent also runs a music programme which offers young people with cancer the chance to get involved in a range of activities to help them develop their song-writing and com-



Singer Grace Nkounkou-Issombe with son Austin

position skills, and grow as performers. It was through CLIC Sargent's music programme that Grace had the chance to professionally record her song entitled In your honour at the Summerfield Studios in Birmingham. The track is about how her faith has pulled her through her darkest times.

Grace said: "The song we've written means a lot to me. It's about how even when I've been in a dark place over the last year, I've never felt alone.

"One of my favourite lines in the song is 'I am fearless when you walk

with me,' because without my faith in God I think I might have been too scared, and given up.

"And even though it might sound strange to some people, cancer hasn't just been a negative experience. There have been a lot of positive things that have come out of all this. I've met so many special people on my journey who have helped me so much, and I have a different perspective on life now. Now I want to make the most of every day that I've got."

Visit www.clicsargent.org.uk

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Adults' time to take the plunge

ADULTS keen to take the plunge and learn how to swim have been invited to take part in a series of swimming lessons at a Black Country leisure centre.

The Crystal Leisure Centre in Stourbridge currently has spaces available for its swimming lessons on Thursdays at 10.15am, 11am and 1pm.

Each session lasts 45 minutes and costs £5.20 per person.

Alan Lunt, strategic director of place at Dudley Council, said: "Swimming is an essential life skill and we strongly believe it's never too late to learn."

"Our swimming lessons have always proved successful and I would encourage people to get in touch and take part."

Before taking part anyone interested should call Dudley Council on 01384 812800.

Past rivalries come to the fore as big three in battle

DUDLEY North is set to see past rivalries renewed as the same three candidates from 2015 face-off in this year's General Election.

UKIP's Bill Etheridge said he is 'up for the Brexit battle' as he confirmed that he would be bidding to represent the party in the June 8 poll.

It came after Theresa May's call for a General Election was backed in Parliament by 522 MPs for and just 13 against.

And the election could be a case of 'as you were' from 2015, with Ian Austin defending the seat he has held for Labour since 2005, and Les Jones once again considering throwing his hat into the ring for the Tories. Sedgley councillor

and UKIP defence spokesman Mr Etheridge said he is hoping to get the nod for another crack at Parliament following his third place finish in the 2015 election.

"I always said that I'd have another shot at trying to get to Westminster after coming fairly close two years ago," said Mr Etheridge, who was third in the UKIP leadership contest last September.

Chance

"Dudley North is where I live and it is the only constituency I want to represent."

Mr Jones said he has spoken to the Dudley North Conservative Association over the possibility of standing again this year. "It is something that I have considered, but I think

whoever the candidate is for the Conservatives will have a good chance," he said.

He added: "With the state of Labour on a national level and the likelihood that Tories who defected to UKIP in 2015 returning, I would say it is a very winnable seat."

Dudley North is likely to be considered a target seat for the Conservatives. Labour currently holds a majority of 11 per cent, but in 2010 it was just 1.7 per cent.

Mr Austin, who grew up in Dudley and lives in the borough, said it was a huge privilege to have served the constituency as an MP. He added that he would be asking the people of the town to allow him to 'continue working hard for them' after this year's election. 'I've worked hard to stand up for folk in Dudley and I always will.'

Baby hurt as car hits pushchair

A BABY was taken to hospital after a car mounted a kerb and hit two women with a pushchair.

The 18-month-old child was thrown from the pushchair, which was left trapped under the car on Ashenhurst Road, Dudley, near Russells Hall Hospital, last Wednesday at around 3pm.

The car left the road hitting two women who were walking on the pavement.

The child suffered minor facial injuries and was taken to hospital along with a 24-year-old woman, who suffered bruising to her head and was given pain relief.

Another woman who was on the pavement and the driver of the car were not thought to be hurt.

The baby suffered minor injuries to its face.

West Midlands Police said the driver of the Peugeot spoke to officers at the scene but was not arrested.

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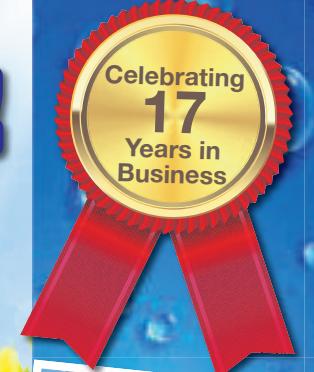
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Last event before a £3m revamp



Volunteers Ceri Cowley and her mother Jeanette

A CHARITY held its last coffee morning at one of its day centres before multi-million-pound work gets underway to develop it.

Mary Stevens Hospice welcomed families and residents to its day-care unit, on Hagley Road, Stourbridge, for an Easter coffee morning. A £3 million project will begin in May to increase the centre's capacity and meet the increasing demand for its services.

Laura Millard, community engagement officer, Mary Stevens Hospice, said people attending were in for a 'fantastic family day'. 'As it's the last coffee morning we'll host here, we're going bigger and better than ever before,' she said. She added that the charity was 'absolutely delighted' character Paw Patrol made a special appearance.

The event was held to say a 'fond farewell' to the day services unit which has served families for 25 years.

The work to develop the day unit is expected to last at least 18 months. It will aim to increase the capacity for users by up to 87 per cent.

Comic Manford tour to arrive at town hall

TV COMIC Jason Manford is to perform in Dudley next year. He will be bringing his new tour - Muddle Class - to Dudley Town Hall on April 27, 2018.

It is currently the only date the star has confirmed for the Birmingham and Black Country area and has been labelled a 'massive coup' by town hall bosses.

Peter Jordan, town halls and entertainment manager, said: 'We're absolutely thrilled to welcome Jason Manford back to Dudley Town Hall. It is a massive coup for the borough to be able to attract acts of this standing.'

Manford is just one of a number of big names who will be performing at Dudley and Stourbridge town halls over the coming 12 months.

Other top acts lined up to perform include Jasper Carrott, Russell Kane, Paul Chowdhry, Doreen Tipton, Rich Hall, Jenny Eclair and Jethro.

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Another Gemini as yet unpainted at the fuel pumps



Shell's Gemini G-AMGF, awaiting collection by Bader

Aircraft had flying ace Bader at helm

MEMORY LANE

By Alec Brew

IN the early 1950s there were two companies building aircraft at Wolverhampton Airport, Pendeford. And one of the aircraft they built was to be flown by the famous legless flying ace, Douglas Bader.

Boulton Paul Aircraft was producing its advanced trainer, the Balliol at the time, but the Airport was run by Wolverhampton Aviation, agents for Miles Aircraft at Woodley Airfield, near Reading.

When Miles went into liquidation Wolverhampton Aviation bought up a large stock of unfinished parts, and from them built six Gemini twin-engined light aircraft, but fitted Gipsy Major engines instead of the usual lower-powered Cirrus engines.

The third of these Geminis, registered G-AMGF, was sold to Shell Refining & Marketing in March 1951, and was to be flown by the legendary Sir Douglas Bader.

Bader had joined the RAF in 1928 but lost both his legs in a flying accident while performing aerobatics at Woodley.

He managed to rejoin the RAF after war broke out and became a fighter pilot, despite

having tin legs. He led a squadron and then a wing of three squadrons during the Battle of Britain shooting down 22 German aircraft, with four shared victories.

Escape

In August 1941 he was shot down over Europe and captured. He made several escape attempts before being repatriated at the end of the war and retiring from the RAF as a Group Captain.

He went to work for Shell, and flew their Proctor light aircraft, until that was replaced by the Gemini, which was collected from Pendeford by the great man himself.

He became Managing Director of Shell Aviation and retired in 1969.

A film was made of his life story entitled Reach for the Sky, with Kenneth More playing the lead role. Bader died of a heart attack in 1982.



Douglas Bader on the wing of a Hurricane fighter

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Ellie Hunt joined her local Slimming World group in Cradley Heath almost a year ago and has now trained as a Consultant for Slimming World, the UK's largest group-based weight loss organisation. Now she is opening her own group in Halesowen at Tenterfields Primary School on Wednesday 3rd May 2017 at 7pm.

"Support is really the most important thing, and knowing you are not alone. I couldn't have lost 3 stone without the weekly help, encouragement and understanding of my own Consultant and group. As someone who has lost weight myself I know the challenges people face, which is why, along with the group, I will be there to support every one of my members all the way to their chosen target weight. Sharing recipes and other ideas, and working together to overcome challenges and celebrate success is so important. At my group, there'll be tons of support, encouragement and fun."



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New chapter for musician as character in horror book

HE is the eye-catching filmmaker and musician most people will recognise for being clean shaven on one side of his face while sporting lengthy locks and a full beard on the other.

Now Stourbridge's Nick J Townsend has conquered another medium after becoming a character in an American horror book.

The multi-talented entertainer is one of the main protagonists in Reaping Sorrows (Children of Enoch Book 2) by author Edward Gehlert.

Nick said: "He [Gehlert] contacted me about a year ago and said he had been following my career. Then he said 'I would really like to use you as a character in my book'."

"I thought 'great, but how?' He said if my band WEAK13 had been around in the States at the time of the apocalypse it would be

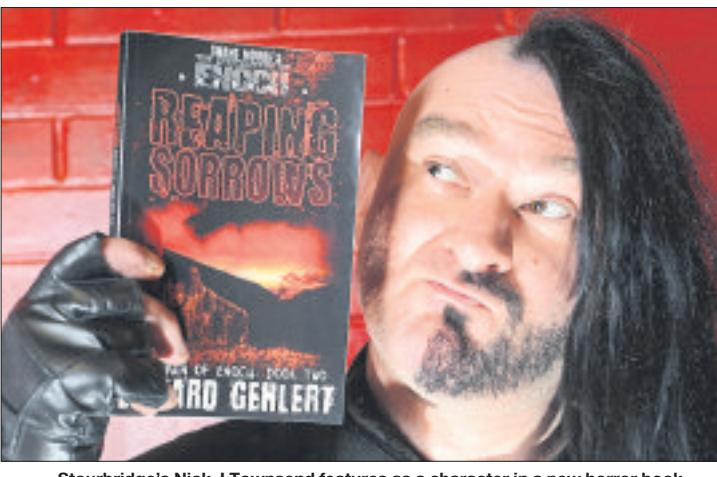
interesting to see how I would handle it."

Nick spent around six months talking Gehlert through his own character including how he talks and reacts to different types of situations. He added: "He has made me a central character having to meet others in the book and explain who I am."

"It is a really well-written book. Unlike other books of this type you do not know if all of the characters are good or not. In one sense they are the heroes but there is also a lot of ambiguity about them."

"The bottom line is I am a fictional character in an American horror book."

Reaping Sorrows was published on April 6. It is the follow-up to Dark Harvest (Children of Enoch Book 1) novel.



Stourbridge's Nick J Townsend features as a character in a new horror book

Bosses want access road in plan for office block

THE owners of the eyesore Cavendish House office block in Dudley want an access road to be created from a major dual carriageway before it is knocked down, it has been revealed.

Bosses behind a long-awaited redevelopment of the site have told council chiefs they need a road to be created from Duncan Edwards Way to draw shoppers to the area.

It could present yet another obstacle in the saga surrounding Cavendish House, which has stood empty for years.

A masterplan for the site would see the derelict office block bulldozed to be replaced by a retail and shopping development.

But owners Avenbury fear the site is currently too closed off to attract sufficient custom and want a road leading to the site to be created near the main dual carriageway, not far from Cousins furniture store.

Venture

Cutting a new road into land off such a busy road would be a major venture, and Highways England would have to be brought on board.

It has been suggested a fast-food restaurant could be built on the access road as a way of attracting people to the site.

Dudley's regeneration boss Councillor Khurshid Ahmed said the site's owners needed to prove the development could create sufficient jobs and growth to get funding from the Black Country Local Enterprise

By Richard Guttridge

prise Partnership (LEP) as it would be unlikely to provide cash for a demolition job alone. It all means the bulldozing of the building appears to be a way off.

Councillor Ahmed said:

"They want to have another entry into the site near the bridge on Duncan Edwards Way. We are working with highways to make sure their request is reasonable."

"We are negotiating and talking and trying to see if we can help them."

"If it is something they feel needs to be added then we should support it."

"There are opportunities in Dudley with the bus station and the metro – all these things are exciting and we want to make this happen."

The latest twist comes after Councillor Ahmed called for Cavendish House to be knocked down as soon as possible and the planning chief reiterated his desire to see progress on the scheme.

If the building, off Trindale Road, is knocked down it is then hoped the area will be redeveloped creating homes, restaurants and shops.

Walk will highlight mental health issues

A leading charity will be hosting a 10-mile walk to raise awareness of mental health.

West Midlands-based health and wellbeing charity, The Kaleidoscope Plus Group, will be Walking out of Darkness on May 6 to raise awareness of mental health and suicide prevention.

The walk across Birmingham will finish off with a family fun day at Canon Hill Park where there will be a showcase of mental health and wellbeing services. Dave Pickard, wellbeing services co-ordinator at The Kaleidoscope Plus Group, is urging people to take part and join in the fun.

He said: "I ask everyone based in the Sandwell and the Midlands area to come along and enjoy the fun. The aim is to unite together with your local community, walk at your own pace, along the Birmingham canals and help reduce the stigma by engaging in conversations with others."

For details visit www.kaleidoscopelplus.org.uk

Coach company driving forward

A BLACK Country coach hire company has expanded due to rising demand.

Greenline Coaches has now purchased three new vehicles. The Stourbridge-based company was supported with £500,000 funding from Santander Business Bank.

Bosses say the cash boost has enabled Greenline to respond to an increasing client base and high demand by purchasing three new coaches.

The coaches are 49-seaters, equipped with air suspension, toilets, air conditioning, Wi-Fi and drinks facilities. Andy Phillips, managing director at Greenline Coaches, said: "Our ethos of putting the customer first has proved to be very successful."

"It has put our company firmly on the map for great holidays, day tours and private hire in the Black Country. We would like to thank Santander and our customers old and new for supporting the growth of the business."

Matthew Smith, relationship director at Santander corporate and commercial, said: "We are absolutely delighted to have been able to support the team at Greenline Coaches to grow their fleet."

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The Firewalk at the Black Country Living Museum



Roger Gray, aged 57, takes it in his stride



Daredevils feel the heat as they brief ahead of the challenge



The burning coals are prepared for the challenge



Hot to trot - all smiles for this participant



There's no smoke without fire - the challenge was a huge success

Daredevils hot foot it for funds

DOZENS of daredevils strode over burning coal in bare feet to raise money for charity.

Around 70 people took part in the Firewalk at the Black Country Living Museum.

Each participant paid £35 to walk over the flaming material, which burned for more than 370 degrees Celsius (700 Fahrenheit).

The money raised will go to the

museum and charity Acorns Hospice. Participants described feeling nervous before taking part but were left on a high once they faced the challenge.

Father and son Roger, aged 57, and Jordan Gray, 17 from Lichfield, were among those to take part. They were raising money for Acorns.

Jordan, who has volunteered for the charity for three years, said: "It was great fun, we enjoyed it. Walking up to the coal, it felt very hot. But

being briefed beforehand helped." They were part of a group of people who worked at National Express.

Roger added: "We set a fundraising target of £700 in total, but we already met that on the day."

Several metres of burning coal was laid out in two rows in the boat docks area of the museum.

Organisers lit the fire and sprayed it with chemicals before gathering participants around the flames to ex-

plain safety precautions. Daredevils then lined up in two rows, and strode along the burning coal to the cheers of the crowd.

The event, held on April 20, used coal to link to the industrial heritage of the Black Country.

It was set up in partnership with charity Acorns.

Lynda Hadley, events co-ordinator at Acorns, said: "Walking over fire is without doubt one of the most thrilling and extreme things you can do.

Whilst it'll be seriously scary stuff, professionals will be on hand to make sure everyone has the best possible time.

"We rely on events like this to raise the majority of the £10 million needed every year to continue providing our care."

Katy Price, development manager at the Black Country Living Museum, added: "We're delighted to host such a special event to raise money for such great causes."

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New water play area will make a splash at park

FAMILIES visiting Mary Stevens Park this summer will have a 'splashing' time with a new water play facility.

Dudley Council has undertaken a recent programme of improvements at the Stourbridge park following a successful application for £2.6 million of Heritage Lottery Fund money.

Savings made throughout the project means there are sufficient funds remaining to purchase the new equipment and work will get under way at the beginning of May to remove the existing splash play area, which has been on site for 18 years.

The new facility is expected to be finished in July with the main area to include water jets, cannons, a spray loop and a flower water feature.

A toddler area with water jets and a smaller water feature will also be installed. Alan Lunt, strategic director for place, said: "This work was not part of the original Heritage Lottery Fund restoration programme but families have told us that they would like to see this improvement and the savings made mean we are now able to include it.

"We are confident that this feature will be particularly popular with families visiting the park during the warmer months of the year."

The new facility will cost £140,000. It will benefit from fresh rubber surfacing, a new control box with state of the art pumps.

Fundraiser ready to take on 100-mile hike

A MAN is hiking 100 miles across the English countryside to raise funds for a wildlife charity.

Dan Hall, aged 38 from Brierley Hill, will be taking part in the Cotswold Challenge - a trek from Bath to Cheltenham - in aid of the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust and hopes to raise at least £400.

Mr Hall said: "Raising money by hiking through some beautiful countryside seems to be the perfect way to help me and wildlife - although 100km is a rather daunting prospect." The hike takes place in July.



Mercian Volunteers Regimental Association



Members were joined by Kidderminster Cadets on their march through the town



It was a proud moment for many taking part

Marching ex-soldiers show pride in parade

SCORES of proud former soldiers from the Black Country and Staffordshire marched through Kidderminster as they exercised their freedom of the town, possibly for the last time.

The parade, organised by the Mercian Volunteers Regimental Association, saw more than 100 decorated former and current soldiers march through the town's streets.

By Jack Averty

association organises an event like this then I think we will be sticking to the poppy day parade and other similar events."

Mick Whiten, a former soldier who attended the parade, added: "Thanks to all those that organised such a fantastic parade, it was really good to see such a lot of 'old' faces. A special thanks for making the effort must go to those that travelled long distances to be there."

As well as exercising the freedom of Kidderminster, the parade also marked the 50th anniversary of the formation of 1st Battalion Mercian Volunteers and the disbandment of the 7th Battalion Worcestershire Regiment.

Kidderminster resident Vic Bozward said: "I enjoyed seeing everyone who served with the Mercian Regiment. The weather was great and the parade and drumhead service went very well. Thanks to everyone who helped to put it together."

The Mercian Volunteers Regimental Association, which has around 500 members, was formed in 1967.

Cheer

As they made their way along the route, they were met by dozens of residents who lined the streets to take pictures and cheer.

Some of the former soldiers from the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the Mercian Volunteers, who make up the regimental association, had travelled from as far as America to be at the parade.

Ted Rowley, aged 74, a former platoon sergeant and founding member of the association, said: "The parade went great. There were people lining the streets, applauding and cheering us on. It will be the last parade like this for a lot of our members. Unless another

New centre opens to improve health

A new wellness centre aiming to improve the health and wellbeing of people living in Dudley has opened its doors this week.

The Albion House Surgery in Brierley Hill will be home to the centre and aims to create a place to give people the confidence to manage and improve their own health well-being.

The centre will offer a variety of alternative services to patients including bereavement advice, Citizens Advice and guidance from the Alzheimer's Society.

There will also be access to courses to help people who do not always need to see a GP and to educate them about other sources of help and support available to them.

Councillor Serena Craigie said: "We welcome the new centre, especially in Brierley Hill as it's one of the main areas in Dudley people travel to. It's fantastic news and will bring good services to the area."



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Award-winning firm has clear vision



Arwyn Jones, of Beacon Centre, with Rebecca Harrison, of winning company DHC Informatics

AN INNOVATIVE device which will improve the quality of life of thousands of people with double vision has received £20,000 after winning a top award.

The Beacon Centre and the University of Wolverhampton joined forces to offer the 2017 Beacon Visionary+ Challenge Award.

The winner has been announced as the 'lens slip occluder', which was developed by Staffordshire company DHC Informatics. The revolutionary device has been developed primarily to treat and alleviate diplopia (double vision) but it can also be effective in the treatment of visual disturbance

caused by such conditions as multiple sclerosis, stroke, head injury, cataracts and glaucoma.

The occluder is an optical device worn over a pair of glasses to improve vision when reading, watching television or using a computer.

The award consists of £10,000 social investment from Beacon and £10,000 worth of consultancy support from the University of Wolverhampton.

The winner was chosen from a shortlist by a panel of leading tech entrepreneurs and sight-loss experts.

DHC Informatics' director Rebecca Harrison said: "Diplopia is one of the most common vision disorder in the

UK today. There are over 100,000 MS sufferers and over 150,000 people suffer a stroke each year, more than half of whom will experience problems with diplopia or blurred vision."

Arwyn Jones, chief executive officer of Beacon, said: "We were particularly impressed with the presentation from DHC and the fact that their product can quickly get to market and benefit people with double vision disorders.

"Beacon is delighted that the competition prize will be used to help the business move forward and develop products. Our investment has inspired an innovative sensory solution that delivers on the aims of the charity."

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Is it illegal to pay your handyman

SPRING has sprung and the sun is out but before firing up the barbecue the garden needs to be mowed, the trees need to be pruned and the handyman is often the best person for the job.

The handyman is a seasoned professional and a jack of all trades; often they can build a bookcase from scratch, sort out the plumbing and clear the gutters.

Hiring a handyman seems like a great idea, but is it really? What happens if the handyman you hired isn't so handy? What if they damage your property? And what can you do if you are not happy with the standard of their work? The experts from the DAS Law are here to answer the important questions.

If the handyman doesn't give you a VAT receipt at the end of the job, who's responsibility is it that the work done is registered for tax?

Any trader who sells goods or provides a service can initially exercise discretion as to whether they want to register with HMRC for VAT purposes. Therefore not all businesses will be in the position to provide a VAT receipt. It would however be good practice to request a receipt for the services received and amount paid in order to ensure that a clear paper trail is available.

Where a business turnover exceeds (the current rate) of £83,000 the business must register with HMRC. The onus of registration with HMRC is on the trader and they are therefore responsible for declaring any income received. Failure to register and declare their full income to the HMRC in order to avoid paying taxes is tax evasion and a criminal offence.

Are you breaking the law by paying cash in hand, and what are the consequences?

The position with any trader is that they are responsible for declaring any cash paid work/income received to HMRC. There are no legal implications for either party to pay in cash for work or offering a discount for paying in cash in order to avoid administration/banking charges. However, this does not negate the trader's obligations to declare the services and cash received to HMRC for TAX purposes. The onus of declaration to HMRC will always fall on the trader. HMRC could potentially argue that you are aiding and abetting the crime, although proving this would be difficult. Therefore the action would generally be against the trader alone.

If you've paid cash in hand, are there any insurance implications if the handyman is injured while at your property?

Any claim for personal injury is based on negligence and not the method of payment used. Any Personal injury claims are determined by the individual facts and circumstances surrounding the injury. In order for the trader to pursue a claim against the homeowner, they would have to prove that the homeowner had caused the injury through negligence, and that it was essentially a foreseeable injury.

There is no reason why paying in cash would affect any liability insurance claim because the legal principles are paramount as outlined above. That said, it is always recommended to check the terms and conditions of the insurance policy to ensure that there are no exclusions that would affect any element of the cover.

Is there any difference in terms of recourse if you're unhappy with the work that is done?

There are implications for failing to obtain a receipt or evidence of any payments made in cash. Without any evidence of the services supplied and amounts paid, this places the consumer into a position of vulnerability.

Although there are no legal consequences for paying in cash, consumers receiving services should be aware that in the event of any poor workmanship or if the business ceases to trade there may be limited recourse available. Trading standards may also be reluctant to help if the services are considered to be informal and there is no clear trail of the legitimate contract agreed. The trader's liability insurers may also refuse to cover a claim where there is no receipt or evidence of the payments made.

The Consumer Rights Act 2015 provides protection for consumers. It sets out implied terms that the trader must follow or they may be considered to be in breach of contract. There is no requirement to have a written contract because the terms are implied by statute regardless of whether they are set out in writing or agreed verbally. However it would certainly be beneficial to have a paper trail available.



Report by Jack Evans

GREAT off-road capability sits at the core of every Land Rover car.

Ever since the first Land Rover project began in 1947, it has been paramount that each vehicle can deal with the toughest terrain and weather.

But where to put this to the test? Believe it or not, the answer lies in the rolling slopes of the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, near Ledbury in Herefordshire.

The first thing you'll notice is Eastnor Castle. It was only built recently (in castle terms), but the 1820 structure is no less imposing to look at.

Crenellations aside, what can you expect from the proving grounds? After all, it's open to members of the public who buy vouchers, while anyone who purchases a new Discovery will be offered the chance to visit the facility to see just what their new car can do.

It's part of Land Rover's new initiative to enable customers to understand just what's going inside their new Discovery and therefore use the technology comfortably.

We were sent out to try a series of different obstacle sections, with each segment testing different areas of the car's capability.

Popular

Firstly, we got behind the wheel of the all-new Discovery to see just how good it is at towing. The previous-generation car was incredibly popular with those who like to hitch up, so the new one has quite the reputation to uphold.

Thankfully, with its towing assist technology, the hard work is taken out of the job – even when reversing a three-axle trailer box. It calculates steering angles for you, meaning there's no need to try and work out just how much lock to use.

One of the key features of any Land Rover is its ability to tackle sticky situations. The area surrounding Eastnor has some of the claggiest mud in the UK, able to cling to tyre treads and suspension components alike.

Even the Discovery, with its heated seats and built-in televisions, has been designed to cope with it – which is why we were next sent out on a rutted, muddy track featuring steep inclines and even steeper drops.

Set to low range, the Discovery happily plugs away at the route.

It's easy to see how other cars would struggle in this area, but the Disco – even on road tyres – manages it well.

It's also an incredible showcase for the car's seamless technology, as it will monitor the ground conditions and adjust its off-road settings accordingly.

After driving down a rocky incline, (where we were tested to keep as much water in a bowl mounted to the bonnet as possible) we headed to an articulation test area.

With high concrete banking and car-killing gradients, it showed the extremes that Land Rover cars are pushed to.

We were then instructed to head straight for a deep section of water, which tested



Conquering the climb – the Land Rover proved its versatility at the test facility at Eastnor Castle in Herefordshire (top)



Splashing through the muddy terrain under the cover of darkness



High concrete banking tests out the car's capabilities

the Discovery's 900mm maximum wading depth to the limit.

Finally, we waited until darkness fell to drive along a muddy, slippery track through the forests surrounding Eastnor.

With the trees lit up by the car's headlights, it certainly felt spooky, and traveling in a convoy did give you the feeling you

wouldn't want to be left behind.

A rabbit warren of these tracks surround the area, giving those who attend one of the Land Rover's experience days the chance to try a selection of different surfaces. You

can do this in the manufacturer's legendary Defender, too.

The facilities at Eastnor Castle show you

that, far from being any soft-roader, Land Rover cars still have the same level of off-road prowess that won them such a go-anywhere reputation to begin with.

If you're lacking in confidence on tricky surfaces, a trip there could be just the thing you need. Equally, if you're an avid thrill-seeker, you're just as well catered for.

Let's hang on to the vintage Valli

REVIEW

Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons, Genting Arena, Birmingham
THERE is a scene towards the end of Jersey Boys – the musical about Frankie Valli and The Four Seasons – where the lead character says: "Like that bunny with the batteries I just keep going and going and going."

And so it comes to pass as the real Frankie Valli is still performing in his 83rd year.

He doesn't bound about on stage like the Duracell rabbit, at his age you wouldn't expect him to. But, Oh what a night!

Valli cannot hit the high notes like he used to, but he was given an early chance to show off the falsetto with which he made his name as Dawn came four songs in.

Video

Of course, Jersey Boys brings to light songs that are not readily associated with Valli, like Stay, Bye Bye Baby, Can't Take My Eyes Off You and Silence Is Golden and all featured here, the latter with help from two of his Four Seasons' backing singers.

There were times, however, when it appeared he had too much helium in his system.

After promising Birmingham he would have even more fun than the last time he was there, the concert began with a historical video montage and ended with pretty much everyone on their feet. There were young and old in the audience, too, indicative of the impact his music has had over the years.



Even in his 83rd year Frankie Valli just loves to perform

And we had a great view of proceedings looking straight ahead towards the stage.

My Eyes Adored You had the glow sticks out early on in front of us. There was also a Frank Sinatra tribute with Under My Skin and a medley of 60s material with Spanish Harlem, My Girl and Groovin'.

Beggin' and Grease were among the big hits that followed before the aforementioned Can't Take My Eyes Off

You had everyone up and the finish came with the four big number ones, namely Sherry, Walk Like A Man, Big Girls Don't Cry and Rag Doll with Let's Hang On to finish.

Valli may be going strong at the age of 82, but you know he won't last forever.

In the meantime, let's hang on to the pleasure he has given his millions of adoring fans in the last six decades.

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Cruise round Atlantic was trip to remember

AN ambition was realised when I read the itinerary Fred.Olsen Cruise Lines was offering, writes Chris Hutchinson.

Their ship Boudicca was visiting exciting places in Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina, and, yes via Cape Verde islands off West Africa. I was also enthused by their ship's shore excursions, offering a wide choice in each port, the tour staff's help and expertise proved invaluable.

Escorted by dolphins, Boudicca's first port of call was Mindelo Cape Verde. Our tour included the lively fish market where exotic catches were displayed, with stall holders competing robustly for custom, then the African market where goods were sold at keen prices. On to Cat Fish and North Bay, where mountain meets white sand dunes which welcome the crashing of Atlantic surf.

Sailing the Atlantic Ocean we got to know our ship. Immediately apparent was the infectious friendliness, intimacy and benefits of a smaller ship. Crossing the equator was fun with King Neptune and his entourage performing the ceremony.

First stop in Brazil, Salvador, a sign says "The place where you breathe the history, soul and essence of Brazil". Our walking tour took in the combination of African and Portuguese history and colourful architecture reflecting back to the 1600s.

The main square "Terreiro do Jesus" an atmospheric hub of cultural activity, women in traditional dress, musicians and dancers perform songs and routines. Here we enjoyed a lunch of "queijo coalho" (goats cheese barbecued then coated in local sauce) delicious at just 50 pence a skewer, I had four! In the streets off the main drag, parades of drummers sounded out the samba beat.

This city is vibrant, colourful and intoxicating, no surprise it's called "the capital of joy"!

Down the coast is Ilheus, after visiting the highlights of this charming town we journeyed through lush forest to Tijupe waterfall, cascading into a crystal clear pool before weaving its way through a rocky tributary. Tranquillity is created with only the sound of the waterfall and tropical birdsong, nature at its best. No visit to Ilheus is complete without sipping a cold beer in bat

Versuvio, the most famous in Brazil.

Next the island of Ilha Grande, once home to pirates. Boarding a schooner we sailed to Blue lagoon, but aquamarine in colour. You swim or snorkel with tropical fish whilst gazing at amazing coral. Sailing on to a deserted beach we soaked up the sun.

Then to Ilha Grande village, situated below rolling hills, carpeted by rain forest, watered by clouds from the Amazon. A labyrinth of

quaint streets adorned with tropical flowers invites you to explore. Here we feasted on Brazilian style chicken with local beer for just £8 per person.

We sailed into Rio de Janeiro full of expectation, first meandering along Copacabana's black and white walkway, absorbing its vibrancy, then Ipanema beach enjoying its quiet sophistication. One of the best ways to see this great city is by a panoramic tour covering highlights, including a funicular ride through urban forest to the imposing statue of Christ the Redeemer, one of the most iconic landmarks in the world; here you also gaze at breathtaking views of Rio. Out of the city, the botanical gardens boasts exotic species.

Arriving at Ilhabela, known as the "beautiful island", waiting in the harbour was our jeep. we travelled a few miles to Pedro do Sino. The indigenous people had a unique way to warn of pirate attacks by hitting the rocks creating the sound of bells. Due to a mineral within the rocks called "Fonolito", these sounds would echo for miles; I couldn't resist having a go.

We continued on rugged mountain trails through the rain forest, a little bumpy, but exhilarating. Descending to Jabaquara beach, our schooner awaited us. First, we relaxed on this idyllic beach, then sailed back to enjoy this quiet small town with its welcoming ambience. We certainly experienced the thrills of Brazil.

Arriving in Montevideo, Uruguay, our guide walked us through the city's impressive main squares where street entertainers and stall holders provide local flavour.

This cruise fulfilled an ambition, exceeding all expectations. Boudicca and its shore tours certainly discovered the difference, leaving us with indelible memories.



The gorge leading down to the sea at Shanklin Chine



The Ocean View Hotel in Shanklin



Old part of Shanklin near the entrance to Shanklin Chine

Get a taste of isle with plenty on offer

NIBBLING on raw garlic, surrounded by all manner of alliums from around the world, I was a bit worried about "offending" anyone later at dinner.

But then again, the party of people at The Garlic Farm and Shop at Mersley on the Isle of Wight were all in the same boat, I guessed, as the sweet/pungent aroma floated around the tasting room.

My 19-year-old son A-Jay and myself were guests of Visit Isle of Wight and the Coach Tourism Association. The other guests in our group were intrigued that a teenager would even want to explore this "retirement" haven.

As it turns out, this is a false perception. This little isle has everything to entertain every age group. It is the sunniest place in the UK, with beautiful beaches, miles of footpaths, a steam railway, theme parks, music festivals, military history, the list goes on.

The Wightlink ferry had taken our coach-load from Portsmouth to Fishbourne.

Winding our way south to the Garlic Farm, a tractor trailer then took us on a 20-minute rumble up to the farm itself, while owner Colin Boswell gave us a potted history. Colin has spent years exploring garlic's history and origins, experimenting with the many different varieties on the island. We then spent a good hour visiting the tasting room – there were a dozen raw, smoked and baked varieties to try – the cosy cafe where you can try garlic beer, and the shop filled with everything garlic.

Our next stop took us south-east to Shanklin and the island's oldest tourist attraction, Shanklin Chine. Carved by nature over thousands of years, this stunning tree-lined gorge cuts its mark from Shanklin Old Village to the sandy beach and esplanade far below.

For nearly 200 years, millions of visitors

HOLIDAYS

Report by Debbie Bennett

have wandered through and marvelled at its chasm-like sides decked in tropical vegetation and towering trees, as well as freshwater streams and waterfalls.

From here we headed to our lodgings for the night, the Ocean View Hotel in sleepy Shanklin. Perched on a cliff top with panoramic views of the English Channel, this charming hotel boasts spacious rooms, some with balcony, an indoor swimming pool, snooker room and entertainment most nights in the ballroom. And tucking into a delicious three-course meal in the hotel's restaurant, the garlic became but a sweet memory.

The next morning the coach took us back inland for a touch of nostalgia. Havenstreet is a living, working museum, and just one of the stations which forms part of the island's steam railway. Guards and drivers don authentic uniforms of the era and they added to the atmosphere on a 10-minute jaunt along the restored line, followed by a tour of the Train Story Discovery Centre, a huge exhibition space housing a collection of locomotives, Victorian and Edwardian carriages and other rare rolling stock.

Next stop was the quintessential English village of Godshill which, as our trusty driver and tour guide Derek told us, boasts some of the oldest architecture on the Isle of Wight. Charming thatched cottages line the winding main street along with traditional tearooms, gift shops and quaint pubs. Godshill is also the site of the first ever Isle of Wight Festival, which took place at Ford Farm in 1968. But the icing on the cake has to be its model village... of the village ... in the village. The attention to detail from the church replica to the thatched cottages and the fantastic use of real trees and moving parts make this an absolute delight.

All too soon it was time to head back to the mainland. A-Jay enjoyed his weekend much more than I imagined and has vowed to return – for the music festivals at least.



The model village at Godshill. Godshill is also the site of the first ever Isle of Wight Festival

Learn about war and peace in the French Ardennes



The War & Peace Museum reopens in September

THE War & Peace Museum in The French Ardennes will reopen its doors to the public in September.

Closed for refurbishment in 2008, the much-anticipated reopening does now mean that The French Ardennes will have another major attraction for visitors to see during the build-up to, and the year of, the 100th anniversary of the end of The Great War.

From France's defeat at Sedan in 1870, to the end of the Second World War, The French Ardennes has stood at the crossroads of history – as well as in the very front line of conflict. And the Museum of

War and Peace stands at the gateway to the sites and museums preserving the memory of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, and the First and Second World Wars, in Novion-Porcien.

It commemorates, amongst other things, the "House of the Last Cartridge", in Bazailles – a village 8 km from Sedan – where commander Lambert's group of seventy men stood up to 2,300 Prussians in September 1870.

World War I is depicted through the life of German and French troops in the trenches. The soldiers had left home with "flowers in their gun barrels", but found themselves in a war in which men on both sides dug underground to protect themselves, giving rise to the figure of the French "Poilu" who suffered the rigours of the seasons, shortages and bloody attacks, which in the end led to mutiny.

Parts of the famous Maginot Line – a fortified underground system which was falsely proclaimed as being impenetrable – ran through The French Ardennes and while this will also be commemorated in the new-look Museum, it's interesting to note that English-speaking guided tours below ground along the Line, can be booked in advance at Fort de La Ferte (<http://www.ouvragealaferte.fr>).

Further details about The French Ardennes, meanwhile, will be featured in the 2017 edition of the Discovery Guide to The French Ardennes which can be ordered by emailing info@ardennes.com, or by telephoning +33 324 56 06 08 (<http://gb.ardennes.com>).



Queueing on the A5 at Ketley heading for the coast

Seaside holidays still have magic of times past

THERE is something magical about the sound of rain drumming on the thin metal roof of a caravan as you sit cosily inside, writes **Toby Neal**.

And I have never since seen insect life to match the big black monsters in our toilet, more properly a latrine – a deep hole in the loamy ground dug by my dad, with a hessian sack rigged in front to protect my mum's modesty. Oh, what she had to put up with!

Sometimes we would drive past Butlins at Pwllheli, a place of dreams for little children like us with all its on-site entertainments. We never went.

It was always, always, a caravan holiday, with a satellite tent or two.

With miles of golden sands, stunning scenery, and weather you can rely on – not necessarily in the way you would like – there is nothing like a seaside holiday in Wales.

And all on Shropshire's doorstep.

What can Tenerife or Majorca offer that Wales can't? Well, we all know the answer to that one, but it is only in the last few decades that the lure of the sun has tempted holidaymakers abroad in large numbers.

Before cheap flights and package holidays, ordinary people simply could not afford such an adventure, and looked closer

to home. Go back not all that many decades before that, and ordinary people didn't go to Wales for a break either, at least not in any numbers, although sea bathing became fashionable in the second half of the 18th century after King George III made a number of visits to Weymouth to "take the sea air".

A number of embryonic resorts sprang up and the well-to-do could enjoy them, while the masses stayed at home. The reason was simple. Working people didn't have paid holidays, and even if they did, there would be no easy way to get to the Welsh coast.

As with so many other things, it was the Victorians who led the way. Once the railways forged through the mountains to the Welsh coast, a whole new world opened up and a tradition of going to the seaside for summer holidays was born.

The tourists came by the trainload – the first train to Barmouth brought more than 1,000. Coastal towns and villages were transformed, with boarding houses and hotels full up during the season.

Those who took a dip in the sea took their lives in their hands. They might have an encounter with raw sewage. That would be survivable, but not so getting out of your depth in an age in which not many

people were able to swim. In the summer, the factories would have the same shutdown periods every year, prompting a huge mass exodus to the seaside by the workers.

The Caravan Club was formed as early as 1907, although they were not caravans as we know them.

There was a rise in popularity in the 1920s, with mass-produced caravans which could be towed by cars, and the 1930s brought the advent of the "streamlined" shape.

Cheap

In the post-war period caravans were used as cheap emergency housing, but it was not long before caravan and camping sites were springing up, offering cheap holidays on the coast, while making an impact on the environment at the same time. There was the rise too of the holiday camps such as Butlins and Pontins. Opened in March 1947, Butlins at Pwllheli eventually catered for up to 8,000 holidaymakers. It closed in 1996.

For those for whom the beach and the sea are not enough, there are those added attractions to make children's eyes light up. The fair, amusement arcades and in some of the large places you might get a pier and donkey rides. All those gaudy sea-

side shops selling buckets and spades too.

Expectations and standards may have changed, but today on summer days the beaches are still packed and the towns are all a-bustle. Not many will have arrived by train or by coach or bus. Overwhelmingly, people go by car. As Shropshire is on a main route into Wales, that meant big traffic jams on the A5 in the 1960s and 1970s and beyond, although the M54 and A5 dual carriageway have eased some of these pinch-point problems.

But for the larger seaside towns which bought in to the summer holiday experience wholesale – places like Blackpool – there is a sense that time has moved on, and they are trying to reinvent themselves. A few years ago, poor Rhyl was described as "down at heel and depressing" and "a refuge for the unemployed, dropouts, and drug addicts." Yet Welsh coast towns such as Aberdovey keep their unsophisticated charms, and continue to draw large numbers from Shropshire and the Midlands. They go back again and again, and some lucky folk have year-round caravans by the sea to which they will pop for regular short breaks.

The coastal path is popular, and Midlanders have snapped up second homes in the area, sending prices up and pricing out the locals.

BEST OF BRITISH IS BACK

Report by Mark Andrews

DONKEY rides along sandy beaches, crowds of children mesmerised by Punch and Judy. Youngsters with buckets and spades clambering from crowded trains.

If this all sounds like a reminiscence from the 1960s or 70s, think again, because the Great British seaside resort is enjoying something of a renaissance.

Resorts like Llandudno, Barmouth, Aberdovey and Weston-super-Mare, once the favourite holiday destinations for people from the Midlands, are back in vogue.

A combination of the weak pound, a trend towards short-stay mini-breaks, and plain nostalgia has led to a boom in visitor numbers to old favourites, and millions of pounds are being invested in new attractions to bring these classic resorts bang up to date.

"I was speaking to some hoteliers in Llandudno at lunchtime, and they were telling me they were taking bookings right up to the middle of April next year," says George Brookes, destination manager for Conwy Council.

"They told me they have been busy since the end of January, even the quiet season is busy now."

He cites the four-star George Hotel on Llandudno's promenade, where construction workers are busy working on the roof.

"They are taking the roof off to build five new suites at the moment," he says.

"They will each have a spa bath on the balcony. They are scheduled to open towards the end of the season, late July or August, and they are already booked up beyond Christmas, and that is before they have even promoted them in full."

Travel marketing group Sojern found that, based on searches and bookings made between October 2016 and January 2017, there was a 23.8 per cent rise in British holidaymakers planning UK stays for summer 2017.

Shorter

On the other hand, the trips are getting shorter. The figures show that more than half of people holidaying at home are planning breaks of three days or less, an increase of 8.8 per cent on last year.

Wales seems to be doing particularly well. New figures showed that there were more than 100 million day visits to Wales in 2016, up by more than a third compared to the previous year. They are also spending more money – £10 more than three years ago, worth an extra billion pounds to the Welsh economy.

Jim Jones, managing Director of North Wales Tourism, said he is confident figures will continue to grow.

"People are beginning to recognise North Wales as a destination which has it all," he says.

"North Wales has got a lot to offer in abundance and within close proximity."

"Lots of businesses in North Wales are investing a lot of money to raise their game and to improve the quality of what they have on offer."

"There are also a number of good quality



Llandudno – North Wales is becoming increasingly popular and there is plenty to see and do



Barmouth – Business is booming, with more foreign visitors



Weston-super-Mare – Very popular with visitors from the Midlands

restaurants being developed, there is a plethora of good hotels and B&Bs, and with all of this happening and all promotions going on, it is one of the reasons North Wales is on people's radar.

Mr Brookes says the weak pound and people's nostalgia for their childhood are among the reasons why people are flocking to the traditional seaside resorts once more.

"You get a lot of parents bringing their children to show them where they went when they were children," he says.

"I think people do come back on nostalgia trips. You also get busy parents, and it is the grandparents who are looking after the children.

"They might bring them to Llandudno for a mini-break."

Younger

Mr Brookes says there is a high return rate for short-break visitors.

"There are so many new things here, they find that three days are not enough," he says.

"You also get a lot of younger people coming on the train down from London."

And he says while the traditional attractions such as the donkey rides, Punch-and-Judy shows and deckchairs on the beach are still extremely popular, today's Llandudno offers other attractions which will come as a big surprise to people who have not visited since childhood.

"We now have two gin distilleries, a whisky distillery, local breweries," he says, adding that there are also many new specialist restaurants and bars to add to the variety.

"If they come back they are still going to see the old things, but you can now go to a brewery for a visit, we have got the Alice in Wonderland Trail where you can download an app and see Alice in your hand."

Just six miles from the M5, Weston-super-Mare has long been a popular choice for Midlanders wanting a short break by the sea.

The latest available figures show that 7,993,000 people visited the North Somerset district during 2015.

"The vast majority of these, 7,453,000, are day visitors, with 540,000 staying visitors," says the council's Richard Turner.

Two years ago Weston received a boost from an unlikely quarter when maverick artist Banksy turned the town's former Tropicana lido into his satirical Dismaland theme park. The attraction, which included airport-style security, a rundown funfair and a pocket-money loan shop for children, attracted 150,000 visitors from around the world, and brought an estimated £20 million in to the town.

Since then, North Somerset Council has been working with fashion tycoon Wayne Hemingway to redevelop Tropicana as an arts and leisure venue. At the moment it is hosting the Funland funfair, and during the summer

it will be the venue for the Hazy Days music festival.

Barmouth, another favourite with people from the West Midlands, has also been experiencing something of a boom, with a big rise in people taking spontaneous short breaks.

And that seems to be the driving force behind the Great British seaside revival. Whereas in years gone by people took just one holiday a year, spending a week or maybe a fortnight in a single place, today's more affluent lifestyles mean people will take several short holidays a year.

The resorts best able to capitalise on this, be it through luxury hotels, gourmet restaurants or major visitor attractions, could reap big rewards.

Currency

It is not just domestic tourists who are flocking to the traditional British seaside resorts.

In fact, Britons come second to Americans in terms of the number of people taking holidays in the UK.

International estate agents Colliers International has predicted the faltering currency will help the UK attract more business from overseas tourists, who are estimated to have spent £22.3 billion in the UK in 2016.

Visit Somerset's chief executive John Turner says that in an effort to capitalise on this market, the organisation spent 12

months photographing the whole county.

"Images sell both internationally and domestically," he says. "We were really pleased with how they came out."

Mr Turner says his website has enjoyed increased traffic since Brexit, with interest from countries like China, Columbia and Uruguay rising by more than 70 per cent.

Meanwhile, the Caravan and Motorhome Club has reported cracking booking figures for Easter.

The recent warm spell has inspired Brits to take advantage of a holiday on home turf it would seem, with the Caravan and Motorhome Club reporting a 7.5 per cent increase in occupancy year on year for the Easter break.

Harvey Alexander, the club's director of marketing, said: "Easter 2017 is gearing up to be a bumper season for domestic tourism."

The recent great weather has certainly been helping bookings for UK breaks. With the summer just around the corner now is the perfect time to book a getaway right here at home.

The Caravan and Motorhome Club has availability across the UK for those keen to explore the great outdoors from holidays all the way from the coast to the Highlands of Scotland to satisfy a range of hobbies including cycling, walking and fishing.

"You are guaranteed to find a break that will please all the family here."

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Good things come in small packages

He describes himself as an old man who wants to complain about the world but offer no solutions. Jon Richardson is the archetypal Grumpy Old Man – who is both grumpy and old before his time.

And the quietly sophisticated comedian will thrill fans when he headlines Birmingham's Hippodrome on Thursday as part of a national tour.

The show follows on from his recent TV hit, How to Survive the End of the World, for Channel 4, which was screened earlier this year.

He says: "The show was basically a small terrified man and his (would you believe it) even smaller and sometimes more terrified wife making a list of the things that they're scared might kill them, and then me going out and looking into them one by one, in the hope that I can come home and tell her, 'D'you know what, actually these are all irrational fears. We don't need to worry about any of them, and we can get on with our lives as normal'.

Jon was supposed to investigate major dangers, such as terrorism, but digressed into looking at the state of sausages and air pollution.

"I think I'm quite small, I don't think that helps. I feel quite small in a lot of ways. And I also think I'm right – we're all going to die of something, and there's just a lot of awful stuff in the world. I know that's not a particularly upbeat message, particularly coming from a comedian, but that's all that life is, really: Dealing with horrific stuff and trying to make it funny," he says.

Demeanour

"I think it's more that it impacts on my demeanour. We've had a couple of incidents where we haven't done things as a family: We'll avoid built-up areas, so there's times when we actually have changed events. But it's more that sort of constant fear of things just stops you being the person you'd like to be. I don't know if this has come across in our dealings so far, but I wouldn't say I'm a particularly sparkling, upbeat person to talk to. I need all the help I can get, so if I could at least not have that voice in the back of my head that's always telling me to look left and look right and look up, and breathe through my nose and not through my mouth, so it's double-filtered, and all those silly things, maybe I'd be a better person if I could live more in the moment."

Jon's wife is also a worrier and they often end up freaking one another out, rather than winding each other up. There are times when it might be easier for both of them to simply go and see a psychiatrist.

"It would, but that would be a selfish route to my goal! It would sort me out, but I am in the role of giving to the wider community, and that's why I'm willing to film my investigations and put them on telly. You will see a genuine upsurge in the wellbeing of Britain. I would say, in the 2-3 weeks after this, there will be an immediate spike. And then in the six to 12 months afterwards we'll start to see the economic benefit of my work."

Jon found a number of weird scenarios in his new TV show. The strangest was meeting a man called Troy in Canada.

"What you often find with these documentaries is that everyone you meet could easily have a documentary all to themselves. People's lives are fascinating, and this documentary was certainly like that. Every issue we looked into, you could have spent not just one documentary, but a series looking into it. As for Troy – there should be some Kardashians or Osbornes-style documentary. For a start there should be a webcam on him all the time, just so that we

Young fogey – Jon's old and grumpy before his time



I wouldn't say I'm a particularly sparkling, upbeat person to talk to

can tune in and watch him for a bit. He gave us so much footage. He's not just invented an anti-bear suit.

"He's invented what he thinks is an improved Kevlar. It's a lighter-weight, more flexible, bullet and bomb-proof outfit for the army, which he's just made himself in his garage. He's created chemical which he says if you drop it in an ocean, it'll separate the oil from the water, so that you can clear up the oil from an oil spill in minutes rather than weeks.

"He's invented his own laser, which he points at his own head daily, to regenerate hair growth. He's one of the most intriguing people I've met in my life. We filmed with him in the bear suit, testing it by driving through a brick wall. The hours in his laboratory were so intense. We could have just aired that unedited. And there's a genuine possibility that he's invented something that could change the world, and no-one's listening to him. Because he sounds so intense, you end up just shuffling out of the room, because he's just terrifying to be with. But undoubtedly he was the most intriguing, and if I was more of a Louis Theroux type, I'd definitely go back and do a full week with him."

● For more entertainment news and reviews see **The Ticket** in your Express & Star every Friday.

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Sheridan Smith in Funny Girl



Funny Girl Sheridan is ready for her star turn

THE West End's brightest star, Sheridan Smith, is coming to Birmingham Hippodrome to reprise her role as Fanny Brice following record-breaking success in hit musical Funny Girl in London.

Funny Girl brought global fame to Barbra Streisand 50 years ago, on Broadway, in the West End and then as a movie musical, and boasts such iconic songs as People and Don't Rain On My Parade.

It tells the story of Fanny Brice who went from burlesque to Broadway, becoming one of America's biggest stage and radio stars of the 1920s and 30s.

Michael Mayer's revamp of the 1964 show features revisions by Harvey Fierstein of Isobel Lennart's original book, and of course retains the songs by Julie Styne and Bob Merrill.

Sheridan Smith won an Olivier Award for her starring role in Legally Blonde at the Savoy Theatre, and an Olivier for her dramatic role in Flare Path at the Theatre Royal Haymarket. In television she won a Bafta for her role in Mrs Biggs and praise for playing Cilla, after originally catching the eye in Gavin & Stacey and Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps.

Funny Girl is at Birmingham Hippodrome from Monday to Saturday, May 8-13. For tickets visit www.birminghamhippodrome.com or call 0844 338 5000.

Funny Girl will visit Wolverhampton Grand Theatre from July 24 to 29 with Natasha J Barnes as Brice. She got excellent reviews when sharing the role with Smith in the West End. The male lead role of Nick Arnstein will be played by Chris Peluso in Birmingham and by Darius Campbell in Wolverhampton. Campbell is now a major stage star after pop hits as Darius.

Rich pickings with American grouch



Rich Hall is rightly regarded as one of the funniest comedians to come out of the US in recent times.

And, as he is based in the UK most of the time, this country has, over the past three decades, had the benefit from his grouchy sense of humour.

Now we are about to enjoy more of his crotchety comedy, as he is on a nationwide tour with his new show Hoedown, coming to Stourbridge Town Hall on May 19 and Stafford Gatehouse on May 26.

The comedian, who has won both a Perrier (Edinburgh Comedy Festival) and a Barry (Melbourne International Comedy Festival) Award, is surely the funniest

curmudgeon in The West (with apologies to Jack Dee and Romesh Ranganathan).

Rich's straight-talking and acerbic comedy leaves his targets reeling and his audiences in stitches. He sends up whichever country he is in, but perhaps reserves his most trenchant scorn for his native USA, and since the arrival of President Trump, he's got that to aim at.

Rich, who has presented such BBC 4 documentaries as Rich Hall's Inventing the Indian and Rich Hall's Presidential Grudge Match, says he is excited to be performing live once again.

"I love the fact that when a live show is over, it's gone. It's happened, and it will never

happen like that again. It can't be replicated. That's a great magical moment," he says

"In every single show, there are always two or three moments where I'm thinking, 'Wow, where did that come from?' You're constantly thinking on your feet."

One of the features of Rich's act is that he goes out of his way to find out about the town he is playing in and then improvise a song about it. "I try to tap into what is happening locally and address that musically.

"I like to do something custom-made every night. Once they realise you're not just trotting out your regular act, people think, 'He's made a real effort. He's on our side, so we're on his side.' Then you can take them anywhere."

Magical circus tale hits The Road



One of the masterpieces of cinema, Federico Fellini's 1957 Oscar-winner, La Strada (The Road), is brought to the stage in a new adaptation at Birmingham Repertory Theatre from May 8 to 13 as part of a UK tour.

La Strada tells the tender tale of wide-eyed Gelsomina (Audrey Brisson, pictured) who is sold to the brutish circus强人Zampano but Il Matto, the tightrope walker, tries to rekindle her broken spirit. Visit birmingham-rep.co.uk or call the box office on 0121 236 4455.

Quality of Mersey sound at Sunflower

Psychedelic pop with a Scouse flavour will be heard in Birmingham city centre when The Sundowners and Edgar Jones & The New Joneses join forces at the Sunflower Lounge on Thursday, May 4. Both bands have new albums out on Liverpool label Skeleton Key Records. As a teenager Jones was in a band with Merseyside legend Ian McCulloch of Echo & The Bunnymen – who has his own gig at Bistro's Robin 2 on May 9 – before forming cult outfit The Stairs, and working with Paul Weller and Johnny Marr. The sunnery sounding Sundowners feature the vocals of Niamh Rowe and Fiona Skelly. Fiona and Alfie Skelly, on lead guitar, are siblings to The Coral's Skelly brothers. Birmingham band Cut Glass Kings will support at the Smallbrook Queensway venue.

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SUNDAY'S TV APRIL 30

CHOICE



Keeley Hawes

BBC1

- 6.00 Breakfast.** **7.50 Match of the Day.** (R) **9.00** The Andrew Marr Show. **10.00** The Big Questions. **11.00** Regional Programme. **12.15** Bargain Hunt. (R) **1.00** BBC News; Weather. **1.15** Homes Under the Hammer. (R) **2.15** Wanted Down Under. **3.15** Big Bang It! (R) **4.05** Points of View. **4.20** Escape to the Country. (R) **5.05** Songs of Praise. **5.40** Pointless Celebrities. (R)
- 6.30** BBC News.
- 6.50** Regional Programme.
- 7.00** Countryfile. Ellie Harrison visits Warwickshire for Hedgehog Awareness Week, and meets three girls who have set up a rehab centre for the animals. Steve Brimblecombe continues trying to prove his wildfowl along the river Tame and its floodplain, and John Craven visits a nature reserve that doubles as a burial ground. Adam Henson meets a farming family in Cumbria and Tom Heap explores Scotland's salmon industry.
- 8.00** Antiques Roadshow. The roving team values more decorative objects and rarities belonging to the public.
- 9.00** Line of Duty. Nick faces lengthy questioning before being charged with Tim Heffer's murder. The AC-12 team is convinced Roz was also involved, but with Hastings coming under pressure from Hilton, the detectives are running out of time to prove their theory, and are forced to risk everything to bring the guilty parties to justice. Last in the series.
- 10.00** BBC News.
- 10.20** Regional Programme.
- 10.30** Match of the Day 2. Mark Chapman reviews the day's Premier League action, which featured Tottenham Hotspur v Arsenal, Everton v Chelsea, Manchester United v Swansea City and Middlesbrough v Manchester City. Spurs finally seem destined to finish above their north London rivals, and victory would be even sweeter as it would harm the Gunners' chances of a top-four finish.
- 11.00** The Women's Football Show. Eilidh Barbour presents action from the latest FA WSL Spring Series fixtures, including Sunderland v Arsenal.
- 12.25** Weather for the Week Ahead. **12.30** BBC News.

BBC2

- 6.30** A to Z of TV Gardening. (R) **7.15** Around the World in 80 Gardens. (R) **8.15** The Beechgrove Garden. **8.50** Countryfile. (R) **9.45** Saturday Kitchen Best Bites. (R) **11.15** Hazel Stott: Building Together. (R) **11.45** Grand Designs. (R) **12.15** MOTD2 Extra. **1.00** Athletics: World Relay Championship Highlights. **2.00** Live Snooker: The World Championship. Hazel Irvine presents coverage of the opening session of the final at the Crucible Theatre in Sheffield, where the first eight frames of the match are scheduled to take place.
- 6.00** Amazing Hotels: Life Beyond the Lobby. Giles Coren and Monica Galetti join the staff working in some of the most unusual hotels around the world, learning the tricks of the trade. (R)
- 7.00** Live Snooker: The World Championship. Hazel Irvine presents all the action from the second session of the final at Sheffield's Crucible Theatre, where a further nine frames are scheduled to take place. The second session of last year's final saw Ding Junhui stage a fightback to trail Mark Selby by just one frame. 7.45 before a snooker player from Leicester recovered to end the day with a 10-7 lead. The commentary team features five former world champions in Dennis Taylor, Steve Davis, John Parrott, Ken Doherty and Stephen Hendry, along with Willie Thorne and John Virgo.
- 8.00** Film: Drive. (2011) A stuntman who moonlights as a getaway driver tries to protect the wife and child of an imprisoned criminal. When the convict is released, the driver tries to convince him to give up his life of crime for his family's sake, but when they work together on a robbery, they end up drawn into a conflict with the Mafia. Crime drama, with Ryan Gosling, Carey Mulligan and Bryan Cranston.
- 12.35** Sign Zone: Question Time. David Dimbleby hosts the debate from Oxford, with a panel of politicians and other guests facing topical questions from the audience. (R) **1.35** Hobo City. After uncovering a revelation from Matteo's past, he and Jac clash over a patient. Meanwhile, Sacha is not himself, but how long will he be able to keep Essie off the scent? Elsewhere, Ric cracks the whip on the Acute Assessment Unit floor, but a surprise visitor soon throws him off his game. (R) **2.30** This Is BBC Two. **12.30** BBC News.

ITV

- 6.00** CITV: Bottom Knocker Street. **6.10** Around the World in 80 Gardens. (R) **6.35** Signed Stories: Share a Story. (R) **6.40** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **6.50** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **7.00** Quobolds. (R) **7.15** Marvel Universe Assemble! (R) **7.30** Thunderbirds Are Go. (R) **7.55** NinjaGo: Masters of Spinjitzu. (R) **8.25** ITV News. **8.30** Weekend. **9.25** Countrywise: Guide to Britain. (R) **10.00** Peston on Sunday. **11.00** Judge Rinder. (R) **12.00** ITV News. **12.05** Fishing Impossible. (R) **12.35** Who's Doing the Dishes? (R) **1.35** Tippling Point. (R) **2.40** Britain's Got Talent. (R) **4.00** Film: On Her Majesty's Secret Service. (1969) James Bond adventure, starring George Lazenby.
- 6.35** Regional Programme; Weather. **6.45** ITV News; Weather.
- 7.00** Bighorse. Jason Manford hosts the comedy game show in which members of the public compete in a series of bizarre physical challenges while wearing giant model heads of David Beckham, Ed Sheeran, Taylor Swift, Prince Charles and Queen Victoria. They must dodge past giant bouncers to get into a nightclub, fight over microphones to record a single, and get away before the paparazzi see them. With commentary from Jenny Powell and Kriss Akabusi.
- 8.00** The Durrells. Larry's latest novel is being published – but nobody seems to be impressed. Leslie has an idea for a new business venture involving making liquor out of kumquats.
- 9.00** Granchester. The villagers play a cricket match against nearby Whittlesey, but after an incident involving contaminated beer, one batsman is found poisoned. Guest starring Peter Davison.
- 10.00** ITV News: Weather.
- 10.20** Lethal Weapon. The festive holiday season weighs heavily on Riggs, who flashes back to past Christmases with his late wife Miranda, Clayne Crawford stars. (R)
- 11.20** Premiership Rugby Union. Highlights of the latest top-flight fixtures, which included Harlequins v Wasps, Bath v Gloucester and Exeter Chiefs v Northampton Saints.
- 12.15** Peston on Sunday. (R) **1.10** Jackpot247. **3.00** Motorsport UK. **3.50** The Cube. (R) **4.40** ITV Nightscreen. **5.05** The Jeremy Kyle Show. (R)

CHANNEL 4

- 6.10** The King of Queens. (R) **6.35** The King of Queens. (R) **7.00** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **7.55** Frasier. (R) **8.25** Frasier. (R) **9.00** Sunday Brunch. **12.00** Formula 1: F1assassin. (R) **1.30** Previewing the fourth round of the season. **2.35** Formula 1 Russian Grand Prix Live. Coverage of the fourth round of the season (Start-time 1.00pm). **3.10** Formula 1 Russian Grand Prix Live. Reaction. A review of the fourth round of the season. **4.30** World's Most Expensive Cars. **5.35** Channel 4 News.
- 6.05** George Clarke's Old House. New Home. George visits a Grade-II listed worker's cottage in Hampshire, as his mission to future-proof historic houses continues. Due to restrictions on planning permissions, the property has become somewhat disorganized, and is in need of a careful makeover. Seeking inspiration, George tours a Victorian stable that was renovated to add a gym, cinema and roof garden. (R)
- 7.00** Escape to Costa Rica. New series. Science writer Gai Vince explores the island, which is the most sustainable nation in the world, home to over 500,000 species of animal and with a national grid run on rivers and volcanoes that is due to be completely carbon neutral by 2021. She meets the republic's president, environmentalists and joins a team of scientists helping to preserve the island's forest and wildlife.
- 8.00** Film: Transformers: Dark of the Moon. (2011) The heroic autobots discover that a spaceship from their own planet crashed into the moon decades ago, carrying their former leader and an incredibly powerful device. They must fight to defend the human race as their enemies the decepticons plot to use this machine to rebuild their own world and destroy the Earth. Sci-fi adventure sequel, with Shia LaBeouf, Josh Duhamel and Rosie Huntington-Whiteley.
- 11.00** Gogglebox. Capturing the households' instant reactions to what they are watching on TV from the comfort of their own sofas. (R)
- 12.05** Film: Mud. (2012) **2.25** KOTV Boxing Weekly. **3.50** Gillette World Sport. **3.15** Shipping Wars UK. (R) **3.40** Building the Dream. **4.35** Location, Location, Location. (R) **5.30** Four in a Bed. (R)

CHANNEL 5

- 6.00** Milkshake!: Peppa Pig. **6.05** Peppa Pig. (R) **6.10** Milkshake! Monkey. (R) **6.15** Paw Patrol. (R) **6.30** Bob the Builder. (R) **6.40** Fireman Sam. (R) **6.50** Oily, the Little White Van. **7.00** Only the Little White Van. (R) **7.15** Paw Patrol. (R) **7.25** Blaze and the Monster Machines. **7.50** Noddy: Toyland Detective. (R) **8.10** Whisper. (R) **8.20** Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. (R) **8.55** Football on 5. The Championship. (R) **9.45** Football on 5: Goal Rush. (R) **10.00** Great Birmingham 10k. Live coverage of the race. **12.00** Film: Getting Even with Dad. (1994) Family comedy, starring Macaulay Culkin and Ted Danson. **2.00** Film: Three Men and a Little Lady. (1990) Comedy sequel, starring Tom Selleck. **4.00** Film: Housesitter. (1992) Romantic comedy, starring Steve Martin and Goldie Hawn. **6.00** Film: Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves. (1991) An English nobleman returns home from the crusades to find his father has been murdered and the local people are repressed by the tyrannical rule of the Sheriff of Nottingham. Branded an outlaw, he recruits a group of bandits to fight for justice and protect the downtrodden. Action adventure, starring Kevin Costner, Alan Rickman, Morgan Freeman and Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio. Edited for daytime broadcast.
- 8.55** **5 News Weekend.**
- 9.00** Greatest Ever 90s Movies. Patsy Kensit presents a countdown of some of the most memorable films from the last decade of the 20th century, including Titanic and Trainspotting. (R)
- 11.50** Football on 5: Goal Rush. Action from the final fixtures of the regular season in League One, including Shrewsbury Town v Bury, Bristol Rovers v Millwall and Gillingham v Fleetwood Town.
- 12.35** Criminals: Caught on Camera. The use of cameras to help police catch reckless and dangerous drivers. (R) **1.00** SuperCasino. Viewers get the chance to take part in live interactive gaming, with a mix of roulette-wheel spins and lively chat from the presenting team. **3.10** Film: Charade. (1963) A distraught widow is pursued by her husband's killers, who have linked her to a missing haul of money. Romantic thriller, starring Audrey Hepburn, Cary Grant and Walter Matthau. **5.00** House Doctor. (R) **5.25** Wildlife SOS. The work of a wildlife sanctuary. (R) **5.50** Roary the Racing Car. Hettie makes an emergency landing. (R)

DIGITAL

- BBC Four**
- 7.00** The Birth of British Music **8.00** The Secret Life of the Motorway **9.00** Horizon: Dancing in the Dark – The End of Physics? **10.00** Trump's First 100 Days **11.00** Being Eve: Kneivel: Storyville **12.30** The BBC at War **1.30** Metamorphosis – The Science of Change **2.30** Horizon: Dancing in the Dark – The End of Physics? **3.30** Close

ITV2

- 11.25** Take Me Out **12.40** Catchphrase **1.20** You've Been Framed! Goes Wild! **2.25** Film: Mr Magorium's Wonder Emporium (2007) **4.15** Britain's Got Talent **5.40** Britain's Got More Talent **6.45** Film: Miss Congeniality 2: Armed and Fabulous (2005) **9.00** The Big Picture Out – The Gossip **9.55** Family Guy **11.30** American Dad! **12.25** The Cleveland Show **1.25** The Vampire Diaries **2.10** Reur East: The Hot Deck **2.25** Teleshopping **5.50** ITV2 Nightscreen

ITV3

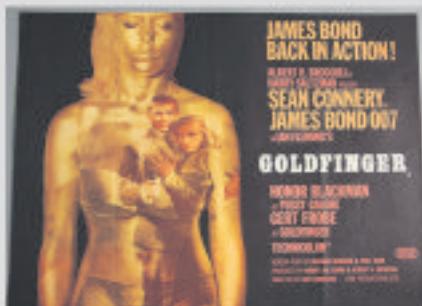
- 11.40** Film: Forever Young (1992) **12.40** Film: Forever Young (1992) **1.40** A Touch of Frost **3.30** War of the Worlds **5.45** Midsummer Madness **6.00** Royal Stories **9.00** Prince Harry in Africa **10.00** Law & Order: UK **12.05** Wire in the Blood **2.00** Lewis **3.40** May the Best House Win **5.20** In Living Memory **5.45** ITV3 Nightscreen **E4**
- 11.00** The Goldbergs **12.30** Black-ish **1.00** Baby Daddy **1.30** Kevin Can Wait **2.00** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **2.30** New Girl **3.00** Film: The Net (1995) **5.15** Rude(sch) Tube Shorts **5.30** The Big Bang Theory **9.00** Marvel's Agents of SHIELD **10.00** Tattoo Fixers **12.05** E4's Tattoo Artist of the Year **1.05** Celebrity First Dates **2.10** Naked Attraction **3.05** Marvel's Agents of SHIELD **3.50** Hollyoaks **Film4**
- 11.00** Hercules (1983) **1.00** Song of the Sea (2014) **2.50** Dr Seuss' The Lorax (2012) **4.30** Short Circuit (1986) **6.35** Mrs Doubtfire (1993) **9.00** Now You See Me (2013) **11.15** The Taking of Pelham 123 (2009) **1.20** The Player (1992) **3.55** Close

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(above) Wrenn OO gauge Queen Elizabeth Locomotive
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(right) James Bond 007 Goldfinger original British Quad Film Poster
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- * Designer Clothes & Handbags - Vintage & Modern Fashion.
- * Film & Music Memorabilia inc. Cinema Posters & Vinyl Records.
- * Comic Books including Marvel, DC, Batman, Spider-Man etc.
- * Cameras, Lenses & Photographic Equipment inc. Leica & Nikon.



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Auctions in May

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and Comic Book Auction
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Vinyl records and Comics including Marvel.

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Monday 1st May 12pm to 4pm
Tuesday 2nd May 9am to 11am

Thursday 4th May at 10am
Toy & Model Railway Auction
Specialist sale including Corgi Toys,
Model Railway items including Hornby,
Star Wars & other sci-fi toys and more.

Public Viewing Times:
Wednesday 3rd May 12pm to 4pm
Thursday 4th May 8am to 10am

FILM CHOICES**MONDAY****Saving Mr Banks, BBC1, 8.30pm**

Walt Disney becomes determined to adapt Mary Poppins into a film, but faces an obstacle in the shape of author PL Travers, who resists the idea of a sentimental Hollywood version of her book. Fact-based drama, with Emma Thompson, Tom Hanks, Paul Giamatti and Colin Farrell. (2013)

TUESDAY**A Walk Among the Tombstones, Channel 5, 9pm**

An ex cop working as an unlicensed private eye is hired by a drug trafficker to find the men who murdered his wife. Crime thriller based on Lawrence Block's novel, starring Liam Neeson. (2014)

WEDNESDAY**The Bling Ring, Channel 4, 1.55am**

Five teenagers united by an obsession with celebrity steal from the houses of the rich and famous stars they idolise, using the internet to follow their targets' movements. When the police finally catch up with them, the arrest brings a taste of the fame they have craved. Fact-based drama, starring Emma Watson and Isla Brouard. (2013)



Saving Mr Banks, Monday, BBC1, 8.30pm

FRIDAY**It's Complicated, Channel 5, 10pm**

Divorced couple Jane and Jake are reunited at their son's college graduation after 10 years apart, and end up sleeping together. Despite Jake's marriage to a younger woman and Jane's fledgling romance with a kindly architect, the pair end up having a clandestine affair. Romantic comedy, starring Meryl Streep, Alec Baldwin, Steve Martin, John Krasinski, Lake Bell, Mary Kay Place, Rita Wilson and Alexandra Wentworth. (2009)

American Gangster, ITV, 10.40pm

The story of 1970s drug kingpin Frank Lucas, whose innovative methods of smuggling heroin into the US made him one of the leading figures in the New York underworld. A detective is assigned to bring Lucas's empire down, but his investigation is undermined by police corruption. Ridley Scott's fact-based crime drama, starring Denzel Washington, Russell Crowe, Chiwetel Ejiofor and Josh Brolin. (2007)

Kayvan promises '100 per cent real news guaranteed'

As the Fonejacker and Facejacker, Kayvan Novak has become known as the man of a thousand voices.

His masterful characters including call centre anti-hero Mr Internet Service Providings, cockney geezer Terry Tibbs and polite Ugandan scammer Augustus Kwembe showed off his remarkable ability to create a range of different characters.

However, Novak is also very versatile and his acting CV includes everything from Oscar-winning thriller Syriana, an acclaimed performance in the 2010 controversial cult comedy Four Lions and voicing Brains in the Thunderbirds Are Go re-boot.

You may have also seen him as a smooth-talking face of boozie's complaints department and in the 2015 BBC Four sitcom Asylum which was inspired by Julian Assange's two-year stay in the Ecuadorian embassy.

And the 38-year-old British Iranian is back on familiar territory with new

satirical series Britain Today Tonight in which he plays a variety of roles at the fictional Channel 9Nine News Network.

The show has been made by Peep Show creators Objective Productions, with Channel 4 describing the format as "a spoof tabloid news show" that shines a light on contemporary Britain and promises "100 per cent real news guaranteed".

And make no mistake, with Novak playing the part of prize-winning American host Douglas 'Digger' Daley, the reporters and even some of the subjects of the reports – this is the 'news' as you have never seen it before.

Britain Today Tonight features brand-new specially created characters, and just like Fonejacker and Facejacker it will see the Bafta-winning comedian causing havoc on the streets of Britain.

Channel 4 explains: "He'll be disguising himself as a range of weird and wonderful personalities in order to perform a range of hidden

camera hits on celebrities and politicians, as well as winding up the public at large."

"With Kayvan at the centre of every 'news report', this is the hardest-hitting, most sensational, and most importantly, funniest news show ever seen. Probably."

The six-part series kicks off with a double bill tonight as 'Digger' Daley and the team lift the lid on what's happening in Great Britain and the rest of the world.

Security correspondent Jon Donovan lets his imagination run wild as he goes to Essex and Tooting, south London, to get to grips with exactly how British shopkeepers are guarding against terrorist attack.

Plus, lifestyle reporter Mandi Manners tries to quit smoking and a debate ensues between a licensed black cabby and an Uber driver.

Finally, entertainment correspondent Mike Armenian follows the auditions for the lead role of gay England football captain Mark Curridge.



Kayvan Novak stars in Britain Today Tonight, Friday, Channel 4, 10pm

BEST OF THE REST

MONDAY**The Island with Bear Grylls****Channel 4, 9pm**

With old and young now living side by side, the islanders are hoping to hit their stride, but the lack of food is an ever-present concern and tempers are fraying. Jordan is feeling out of sorts and then has a fight with Richie, while the members of the group are furious when Phil uses some olive oil to boost the fire rather than for food.

Little Boy Blue**ITV, 9pm**

Family and friends attend the funeral of 11-year-old Rhys Jones is laid to rest, while a police raid at the home of Kevin Moody leads to the recovery of the gun used in the schoolboy's murder. Moody must choose between being labelled a grass and risking violent retribution or protecting the killer and facing jail time. But an unexpected result from the forensic tests on the firearm leaves the entire investigation hanging in the balance. .

TUESDAY**Paul O'Grady: For the Love of Animals – India****ITV, 9pm**

The presenter concludes his Indian adventure with a trip to Assam, which is most famous for its tea but

is also important for wildlife – it's home to Kaziranga National Park. Paul pitches in at an animal rescue centre, where he finds himself helping to look after eight elephant calves. He also heads to a local village to learn more about how the residents and animals live side by side – and tries his hand at goat herding. Then it's on to Northern India and a rescue centre that specialises in caring for sloth bears. Paul is put on porridge duty, and discovers the animals do have a real taste for it. In fact, the job keeps him so busy he might not even have time to make it to the Taj Mahal before sunset, but there are still plenty of others sights to see when he goes out on a wildlife emergency call, and is faced with a huge python.

WEDNESDAY**Madeleine McCann: 10 Years On****BBC1, 9pm**

British toddler Madeleine McCann's disappearance 10 years ago from a holiday apartment in the resort in the Algarve region of Portugal has been investigated by police forces in two different countries – but they came up with contradictory conclusions. So what really happened to the three-year-old in Praia da Luz on the night of

May 3, 2007? Reporter Richard Bilton – who has covered the story for the BBC since the first days – examines the evidence and tracks down the men British police have questioned about the case.

THURSDAY**Mind the Age Gap****Channel 5, 10pm**

With society apparently more divided than ever, 12 volunteers from two different generations attempt to bridge the gap. In this five-part series, no topic will be left untouched, but can a willingness to understand each other end positively or will it just open more questions about today's society? During the first dinner, an attempt at getting to know each other triggers uncomfortable debates. Tension is in the air, and gay marriage is the first topic that divides old from young. While the older group is keen to debate, the younger ones, including Niaman and Jed, sense an opportunity to



Madeleine McCann: 10 Years On, Wednesday, BBC1, 9pm

party. Then, an innocent game of Guess the Celebrity quickly turns into a raging debate about the EU, in which members of all ages clash.

FRIDAY**Versailles****BBC2, 9pm**

Princess Palatine gets a cold reception in the bed of her new husband Philippe following their marriage celebration. Meanwhile, young Sophie learns her destiny lies in an even crueler match – by order of King Louis. Elsewhere, Bon temps spots misbehaviour that suggests a new prime suspect for the poisonings to Marchal and a remark by medic Claude echoing an earlier comment, clarifies the case. Period drama, starring George Blagden, Jessica Clark and Lizzie Brochere.

Hospital People**BBC1, 9.30pm**

Viewers of a certain age will recall Only When I Laugh, the ITV sitcom which left millions in stitches in the 1980s. Now this similar show is also doing a good job of tickling the funnybone. In this offering, a benevolent local businessman seeks treatment in Brimlington Hospital – much to manager Susan Mitchell's delight. The cast includes Mark Williams, Janine Duvitski and Tom Binns.

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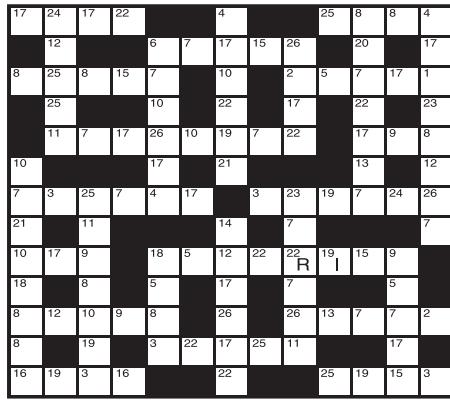
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BRAIN GYM

No.427

Codeword

Each number in the grid represents a different letter of the alphabet and every letter of the alphabet is used. Use the given letter(s) to the right of the main grid to start you off.



LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION:

1	Q	L	B	W	D	P	O	E	Y	V	X	I	H
14	M	A	F	T	S	G	K	R	C	N	J	U	Z

Quiz

- What do we call an invertebrate whose body is divided into head, thorax and abdomen?
- In which country did the mazurka originate?
- Which late comedian jokingly insulted Prince Charles at the British Comedy Awards?
- Which colonel administrator was responsible for the acquisition and foundation of Singapore?
- By what other name is Israel's Lake Tiberias known?
- Who was the first monk to become archbishop of Westminster?
- Who wrote the novel Flamingo Feather in 1955?
- Which volcano buried Pompeii in AD 79?
- Whose father was Robert I, known as The Devil?
- In which city is Romeo and Juliet set?

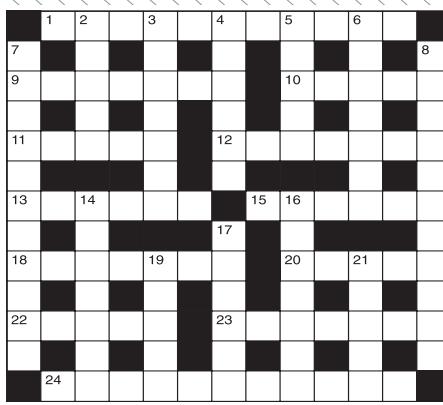
Double Crossword

Choose either quick or cryptic clues - both fit the same grid.

Cryptic Clues:

Across

- Soldier in the nursery? (11)
- Bill speaking well? (7)
- Useful quality in the manner laid down (5)
- Spartan slave emerges from hotel (5)
- Passage taken straight from pamphlet (7)
- Sector guard (6)
- Change of backbone is plan (6)
- E.g. lanes in Africa (7)
- Kenneth is to receive the souvenir (5)
- Public voter (5)
- Was seen about in this place since (7)
- Relate empty reforms in moderation (11)
- Soldier in the nursery? (11)
- Bill speaking well? (7)
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Quick Clues:

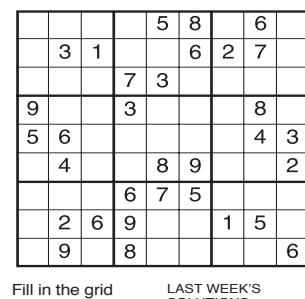
Across

- Knowledge (11)
- Withdrawal (7)
- Allude (5)
- Flanks (5)
- In name only (7)
- Selected (6)
- Calculate (6)
- Treachery (7)
- Blooming river? (6)
- Rise to such costume (3-2)
- Get down to service instruction (5)
- Well known (5)
- Superintend (7)
- Revolt (6)
- To drum (5)
- Umbrage (7)
- Suing (11)
- Outside (4-3)
- Consumed (5)
- Speechify (5)
- Speedy (7)
- Informal (4,3,4)

Down

- Yield on one occasion in three consecutive letters (7)
- The condition of the sufferer under treatment? (7)
- Blooming river? (6)
- Rise to such costume (3-2)
- Get down to service instruction (5)
- Knowledge (11)
- Withdrawal (7)
- Allude (5)
- Flanks (5)
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- Suing (11)
- Outside (4-3)
- Consumed (5)
- Speechify (5)
- Speedy (7)
- Informal (4,3,4)

Sudoku



Fill in the grid above so that every column, every row and each of the 3x3 boxes contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS >

5	7	9	3	1	2	4	8	6
2	3	4	7	6	8	9	5	1
6	8	1	5	4	9	2	3	7
1	6	3	4	2	7	8	9	5
8	2	7	1	9	5	6	4	3
9	4	5	8	3	6	7	1	2
7	1	6	9	5	4	3	2	8
4	5	2	6	8	3	1	7	9
3	9	8	2	7	1	5	6	4

LAST WEEK'S CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS:
 CRYPTIC - Across: 1 Keep left; 5 Cord;
 9 Able; 10 Strikers; 11 Order; 12 Rhythm;
 13 For the present; 18 Race card; 19 Avid;
 20 Examine; 21 Fishy; 22 Some; 23 Standard;
 Down: 2 Embargo; 3 Prefect; 4 Future perfect;
 6 One-time; 7 Dissect; 8 Single; 13 Forgers;
 14 Reclaim; 15 Hectic; 16 Seabird; 17 Neither.
 QUICK - Across: 1 Peculiar; 5 Fair; 9 Menu;
 10 Appeared; 11 Minus; 12 Embroll; 13 Fellow-feeling; 18 Outright; 19 City; 20 Derange;
 21 Snubs; 22 Dull; 23 Reviewer;
 Down: 2 Eremite; 3 Unusual; 4 Apple of the eye;
 6 A priori; 7 Reel flag; 8 Feeble; 13 Flooded;
 14 Literal; 15 Orient; 16 Licence; 17 Notable.

Niner

Each number from 1 to 9 represents a different letter. Solve the clues and insert the letters in the appropriate squares to to solve a word which uses all nine letters.

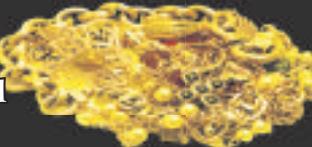
73921
4522785
92262

gives an animal,
gives a second animal,
gives birds.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

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Peri cool place for lunch

It's a popular high street chain and Wolverhampton Nando's has had a revamp. EMILY BRIDGEWATER checks it out

MEDIUM, hot, or extra hot? How spicy do you like your Nando's? How hot?

If the sub-zero temperature in Wolverhampton's revamped branch of Nando's was anything to go by, at the time we visited, then it's extra hot all the way. My two pals and I visited the popular Afro-Portuguese chain one lunchtime, shortly after it had reopened following a month-long refurb.

They've done a good job; the restaurant has been opened out and new fixtures and fittings have given it slightly tired interior a fresh lease of life. But the first thing we all comment on is the temperature – it's colder in than out. We are however, warmly greeted by a friendly member of staff who offers us a choice of tables.

Options

And so to the menu, which everyone knows features predominantly chicken plus a handful of other options for veggies and the likes.

There was talk of salads but all good intentions were thrown out and we opted for burgers, pittas and plenty of sides.

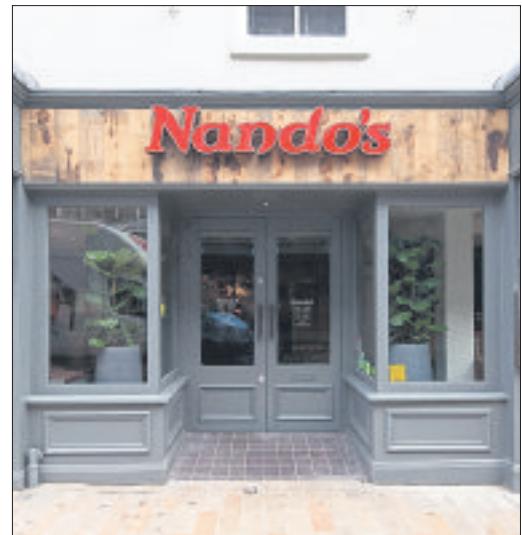
The man among us plumped for the butterflied chicken, while my friend and I sidelined the chicken in favour of beanie burgers.

Orders are placed at the counter – the same guy serves me as showed us to our table, and he's as breezy and friendly as when we arrived. Full marks for pleasant staff.

Starters included humous with peri peri drizzle and warm pitta bread strips and a trio of chicken wings spiced to your liking. Meanwhile, the main courses feature all manner of chicken dishes, from burgers to the whole she-



Nice 'n' spicy – how hot do you like your chicken at Nando's? Here it's served with spicy rice and a side salad



The newly-revamped Nando's in Queen Street, Wolverhampton

bang, as well as a fillet steak wrap for those who the lure of red meat is too great, and salads for those 'trying to be good'.

We start with gigantic olives and some spicy nuts although unfortunately my friend finds a hair in the latter. Add three refillable drinks and some good conversation and we're kept busy enough until our main courses arrive. The olives were fairly plump and juicy, and the nuts – a pleasing mix of cashews, almonds and macadamias – well-seasoned and moreish.

The double butterfly chicken drenched in hot sauce looked appetising, as did the two beanie burgers (both medium hot) in pitta breads, packed with crunchy shredded cabbage and carrot. Three spicy chicken wings plus sides including macho peas, coleslaw, chips, mixed salad, corn on the cob and a supergrain salad, and we tucked in with gusto.

My beanie patty in a pitta, topped with haloumi, filled a hole without being something particularly memorable. The burger fea-

tures chickpeas, sweetcorn, lentils, peas and pumpkin seeds, bound together with Cheddar cheese, although none of the ingredients particularly stood out. It all seemed a bit of a bland mush. The salad was fresh and the cheese griddled to perfection.

The chicken muncher was also overwhelmed, commenting that his bird was a bit dry. The same goes for the chicken wings, he said, mournfully. Side dishes were hits and misses. We all agreed the supergrain salad

with grains, greens, beans and an avocado and buttermilk dressing. We also liked the minty, chilli-spiked macho peas.

We managed to munch through most of it and we were left stuffed and unable to face dessert despite tantalising options such as a traditional Portuguese custard tart (natas), salted caramel brownies and carrot cake.

The bill came in at £50.85 including three refillable soft drinks, which seemed reasonable for the sheer volume of food.

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A charismatic detached bungalow, 140 Abbey Road, Warley, Bearwood, has a pleasant garden and great living space.

It is for sale through Love Your Postcode at offers over £209,950.

The accommodation includes a hallway, a good sized reception room with a large bay window and kitchen with ample space for a breakfast/dining area and there is a separate utility area.

The two double bedrooms are both good sized. The family bathroom has a three-piece suite including a combined shower and bath.

A large loft space runs across the whole property. This is perfect for storage or can be converted into a dormer, said a spokesman for the selling agent.

Contact Love Your Postcode on 0333 344 7772 or visit www.loveyourpostcode.com



Charming semi-detached home perfect for family

This charming semi-detached property in Abbey Crescent, Oldbury, is perfect for a family.

It is for sale through Robert Oulsnam at £174,950.

Features include three bedrooms, a spacious lounge and generously-sized rear garden.

Its accommodation briefly

OLDBURY

£174,950

comprises an entrance hallway, a lounge, a breakfast kitchen, rear vestibule, WC, three bedrooms, a bathroom and under-stairs storage.

This semi-detached property is set

within the town of Oldbury, closely bordering Bearwood. Within 1.3 miles are the high street amenities of Bearwood, and the Wolverhampton Road lies just 0.3 miles away, providing excellent transport links to both the city centre and M5. The popular Warley Woods and Warley Golf Club can both be accessed within 0.5 miles of the property.

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NUNEATON, Bettina Close £750 pcm+Fees
Well presented modern 3 bedroom link detached house in a quiet cul de sac position featuring: Spacious lounge/dining area, fitted kitchen with appliances, conservatory, lovely maintenance free garden, 3 bedrooms, family bathroom with shower, garage & driveway for 2 cars. EPC: TBC



HALESOWEN, Hurst Green Road £750 pcm+Fees
A lovely large end terraced home in this popular area of Hurst Green featuring 3 good size bedrooms, also an additional loft room for storage/office room /games room etc., spacious lounge, kitchen/dining area with a table and chairs, modern house bathroom with shower, downstairs w.c., driveway for 2/3 cars. A property not to be missed! EPC: E



HALESOWEN, Mendip Road £695 pcm+Fees
A spacious 3 bedroom semi detached home on the Squirrels Estate in Halesowen/Hayley Green, being double glazed and centrally heated throughout. Being located on this popular estate the property would make an ideal family home and has accommodation to comprise a reception hall, dining kitchen, 3 large bedrooms, house bathroom with shower off the taps, parking and garage. MINIMUM CONTRACT 12 MONTHS. EPC: D



CRADLEY HEATH, Reddall Hill Road £675 pcm+Fees
An immaculate 3 bedroom modern semi detached property benefitting from: Entrance hall, lounge, lovely fitted kitchen with appliances, downstairs w.c., 3 bedrooms, family bathroom with shower, front & rear gardens, allocated parking for 2 vehicles. EPC: TBC



QUINTON, College Road £650 pcm+Fees
Traditional 2 bedroom terrace located in a very popular & convenient location close to shops, 24hr gym & bus route directly to Birmingham City Centre. The property has a lovely front reception room, large kitchen with dining area, utility room, downstairs w.c., private rear garden. Upstairs there are 2 good size bedrooms & a modern family bathroom with separate corner shower. Not to be missed! EPC: TBC



BIRMINGHAM, St Pauls Place £600 pcm+Fees
A part furnished ground floor studio apartment in St Pauls Square. The apartment features access via secure concierge entrance, hallway, fitted bathroom suite with shower over bath, bedroom area with fitted wardrobes and chest of draws, open plan kitchen/lounge area with sofa and fitted appliances, including fridge, oven, hob and washing machine. EPC: TBC



TELFORD, Peveril Bank £595 pcm+Fees
A lovely modern well presented 2 bed semi detached house with driveway parking for 2 cars & a car port in a cul-de-sac location. Hallway, lounge, kitchen with appliances, conservatory, private rear garden, 2 good sized bedrooms, bathroom with shower. EPC: D



HALESOWEN, School Lane £575 pcm+Fees
A lovely modern cottage of immeasurable character in the central Halesowen area is now available, front reception room featuring dining with fireplace, rear conservatory, kitchen/diner, separate dining area, stairs leading to 1st floor double bedroom with fitted wardrobes, bathroom with corner bath and electric shower. 2nd floor double bedroom also with fitted wardrobes. Not to be missed. EPC: D



ROWLEY REGIS, Mincing Lane £575 pcm+Fees
An unfurnished traditional 3 bedroom semi detached house in a popular location, would be ideal for local shops, bus routes and the M5. Features front porch, entrance hall, lounge, dining room, fitted kitchen, stairs leading to first floor, double glazed and on road parking. EPC: C



ROWLEY REGIS, Halesowen Street £575 pcm+Fees
An unfurnished end terraced property within walking distance to Blackheath Town Centre. This lovely house features a spacious living room, fitted kitchen, conservatory, downstairs w.c., 2 large double bedrooms, 2 en-suites. Benefits include gas central heating, double glazing, 1 parking space only, rear garden. EPC: C



CRADLEY HEATH, Wesley Close £575 pcm+Fees
An unfurnished modern house, close to shops and local train station, briefly comprising of: gas central heating, living room, fitted dining kitchen, 2 bedrooms, bathroom with shower, front & rear gardens, allocated parking X 2. EPC: C



BRIERLEY HILL, Foxdale Road £525 pcm+Fees
Been freshly redecorated and within a 5 minutes drive of Brierley Hill town centre & few minutes more from Merry Hill shopping centre, is this unfurnished semi detached back to back house, comprising of: 2 bedrooms, house bathroom with shower, nice sized lounge, fitted kitchen, allocated parking space, front garden. EPC: C



ROWLEY REGIS, Truro Close £525 pcm+Fees
*** 1ST MONTHS RENT HALF PRICE *** Ideal for access to the M5 J2, Rowley Regis Train Station and Local Shops. This lovely unfurnished or part furnished semi detached back to back house features living room, fitted kitchen with fridge freezer, 1 double bedroom and 1 single bedroom, house bathroom (NO SHOWER), gas central heating, front & side gardens, allocated parking space. EPC: TBC



HALESOWEN, Hamilton Avenue £475 pcm+Fees
An unfurnished ground floor flat, on a popular development of the Abbey Fields. A lovely apartment which is not to be missed features 1 double bedroom, fitted kitchen, spacious lounge, electric storage heating, double glazing, allocated parking, communal garden. EPC: C



BRIERLEY HILL, Bell Street £465 pcm+Fees
Conveniently located to Brierley Hill Town Centre and Merry Hill Shopping Centre. A lovely ground floor apartment set in quiet surroundings. This lovely apartment featuring a modern fitted kitchen, 2 large double bedrooms, spacious lounge, modern bathroom with shower, allocated parking. Available now and not to be missed. EPC: TBC



OLDBURY, Causeway Green Road £450 pcm+Fees
Deceptively large and spacious. A split level apartment above local shops, within walking distance to local schools, Lidl supermarket, bus route and public transport links. Open plan lounge, central heating, spacious living room, fitted kitchen, 2 double bedrooms, bathroom with shower, parking to rear, with the added bonus of a porch, unfurnished. EPC: D



HALESOWEN, Pippin Avenue £425 pcm+Fees
An unfurnished, modern, spacious ground floor flat on this popular estate and briefly comprising: open plan living room, fitted kitchen, 1 double bedroom, bathroom with shower, electric storage heating, double glazing, parking space. MINIMUM CONTRACT OF 12 MONTHS. EPC: D



STOURBRIDGE, Stamberry Mill House £425 pcm+Fees
Fully refurbished apartments within a stones throw of Stourbridge Town Centre and on the number 9 bus route. This stunning 1 bed/floor apartment on the 1st floor features an open plan lounge/fitted kitchen, shower room, 1 double bedroom & private rear parking. Not to be missed! EPC: C



BRIERLEY HILL, The Breeze £400 pcm+Fees
A delightful modern 1 bedroom 1st floor apartment in this convenient position within easy distance of local schools, shops, road and public transport links. Open plan lounge/fitted kitchen with appliances, double bedroom, bathroom with shower. Allocated parking for 1 car. EPC: B



LYE/STOURBRIDGE, High Street £375 pcm+Fees
In the Centre of Lye which is ideal for buses, shops and Lye Train Station. This spacious 2nd floor apartment features a lovely lounge, 1 double bedroom, bathroom, modern and contemporary kitchen/diner, electric heating, double glazing, on road parking. EPC: E



KIDDERMINSTER, Bewdley Road £350 pcm+Fees
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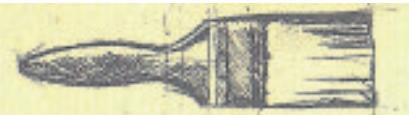
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Blend of performance and economy

By John Griffiths

Vauxhall's Corsa used to be the baby of the pack – that role now goes to the Viva – but it still holds the title of one of Britain's favourites, consistently in the top five best-sellers list.

It has grown, matured (and naturally become more expensive too) as the Adam and the new Viva have taken its place as Vauxhall's most affordable models.

In doing so it has improved, grown and become more economical ensuring that it remains a totally credible rival for the top-selling Ford Fiesta.

The test car was a top of the range Limited Edition, with the latest and arguably most efficient engine under the bonnet. It's a stylish car, with a high class interior with a modern, sporty theme and premium materials, as befits its £17,360 price tag (undercutting the equivalent Ford by a couple of hundred pounds). It is also well-equipped, including Vauxhall's sophisticated touchscreen and connectivity system, although satnav isn't on the standard kit list.

The power plant was Vauxhall's latest 1.0 litre, three cylinder turbocharged engine – which appears to be the engine of the future judging by how many manufacturers are doing for the same size/format.

The figures speak for themselves: 0 to 62mph in 10.3 seconds, an official average of 57.6mpg (I got between 44 and 49mpg in varying conditions) and a low 113g/km of CO₂. That betters the older, 1.4 petrol engine in the Corsa range in each department, particularly performance (0 to 62mph in 15.5 seconds).

The difference is not only the extra power (115PS) of the little turbo, but the boost provided by the forced induction, creating torque (170Nm) more akin to a small diesel unit than a petrol one.

This combination is a world away from normally aspirated, 1.0 units of yesteryear, even though most had an extra cylinder.

On motorways or on hills, it performs at lower revs, therefore remaining quieter and smoother: more like a 1.6 litre unit but using less fuel and producing lower emissions.

The Limited Edition runs on sports suspension, complementing the sporty interior trim such as aluminium pedals and leather-clad, sports style steering wheel.

It sits on 17-inch black alloy wheels and wide, low profile tyres which give a firm but not uncomfortable ride. The six-speed gearbox is slick with a short-throw action, and the steering is quick and positive.

With the benefit of the sports suspension, the ride height is slightly slower and turn-in sharper, with less body roll through the quicker corners.

In short, its dynamic combination of suspension steering, ride and performance sufficient to put it in the 'warm hatch' category – but with a rather more cosseting and mature experience than some who shout that designation from the rooftops.

The dash is dominated by the now usual central touchscreen controller with Vauxhall's latest multimedia system, and an ability to link up with smartphone functions.

The car also has Vauxhall's excellent OnStar system: just three buttons which give you instant access to human operators (in Luton) for a wide range of assistance, from helping

VAUXHALL CORSA LIMITED EDITION, £17,360



The Limited Edition Corsa is a rewarding drive with sporty styling and a good blend of performance and economy

to locate your car) to checking the vehicle's vital functions, providing directions or sending the emergency services to your location in the event of an incident. It's a useful system, more normally found on much more expensive cars.

The dash is divided by a horizontal, body coloured flash of metal along with highlights of chrome and black gloss panelling, making the cabin a modern and pleasant place to be. The sports-style wheel has an array

of remote control functions for audio, handsfree telephone, cruise control and a comprehensive trip computer.

The Limited Edition also comes with a heated windscreen, tinted rear windows, air conditioning, hill start assist, tyre pressure monitoring, electrically heated and adjusted door mirrors, and sports-style front seats. It has plenty of head and leg room for four adults (five could be a squeeze) and a class average boot for 280, with the rear seats up.

The Limited Edition is the consummate Corsa: a rewarding drive, sporty styling and a good blend of performance and economy.

It also sits at the top of the range price-wise, and some drivers will no doubt opt for the proven 1.3 turbo diesel with its potential fuel economy of more than 88mpg.

The Corsa range starts with the older, 1.4 petrol engine (with a modest 75PS of power) at £10,685. There's a 90PS version, too.

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Busy times – club chairman David Robinson in front of the pavilion



The club pavilion which should be open later this year



Hands on – all hands to the deck as helpers turn out to get things ready



Cannock Cricket Club getting ready for the new season

Ricky training with a WBA champion

RICKY SUMMERS has been taking his preparations for a shot at the British light heavyweight title to world level. It has been confirmed that his rescheduled shot at title holder Frank Buglioni will take place on Saturday June 3.

It will again be at the O2 Arena in London where Summers, from Tipton, and Buglioni were first due to meet on the under-card to the clash between David Haye and Tony Bellew.

The titlist withdrew from that March 4 date after sustaining a cut in training, but Matchroom Boxing promoter Eddie Hearn has stayed true to his word that the contest will still take place.

Summers has shared a training ring with Nathan Cleverly, the Welshman who is the reigning WBA title holder and two-time world champion in the light heavyweight division.

Summers has also put another world ruler, Carl Froch, through his paces in the past as he works up towards his own night of reckoning.

He said: "Training with Nathan is ideal for me, because Frank is big at the weight although I think I'll be the naturally bigger man on the night."

"I'm just over the moon to have a second chance."

Neal's frustration over bar on race

STOURBRIDGE'S Matt Neal has criticised the decision to bar him starting the final race of the second weekend of the British Touring Car Championship.

Three-time champion Neal is already 42 points adrift of leader Tom Ingram in the standings after a promising start to his Donington Park weekend petered out.

After qualifying fifth, Neal took second in the first race and seventh in the second before a premature end to the third.

Having taken the lead at the first start, Neal aquaplaned off the circuit.

He was pushed out of the gravel by the marshals and took up his front-row position for the restart, only to be told he couldn't race after receiving 'outside assistance'.

But Neal said: "If the race stops before the leader has done two laps it's declared a no contest and all available cars can restart the race."

It's something we've got to take up now."

Davies is keeping true to his weight

TIVIDALE'S Ryan Davies plans to remain at welterweight as he makes the transition from kickboxer to paid pugilist. The 24-year-old is preparing to become a pro with a four-round bout against Matthew Ashmole in Birmingham tomorrow.

He features on Errol Johnson's BCB Promotions bill at the Icknield Road fight scene, in the Edgbaston area of the Second City. The show has been titled Heavy Artillery. Davies comes into the code under the tutelage of another former kickboxer, Tyler Shakespeare, who has also brought Kyle Williams across the sports.

And Davies said: "It's a new challenge, but guts is my game and I want that title. I live the gym and I'm always on it, getting as fit as I can be. You can outwork an opponent in any sport and I don't think many opponents will be able to match me for my engine and desire. I'm training harder now than I ever have in kickboxing, because I want to do as well as I possibly can in boxing. My ambitions are high, but so is my dedication."

The main event of 'Heavy Artillery' will see Wolverhampton's Josh Burke and Coventry's Dilly Singh contest the vacant British Challenge cruiserweight title over eight rounds.

Howzat? Club building for brighter future

SPORTING MEMORIES

By Joseph Masi

"Club members have put in loads of hours across the winter to do as much as they can," he continued. "It's between 300 and 400 hours of work that's gone into getting the changing rooms ready."

"What will be the new pavilion is a 1980s building and it needs bringing up to the right specifications."

"We have got rid of a lot of stuff and done as much work as we can in the existing building which we hope will become the new changing rooms and kitchen area."

"The new pavilion extension will then be attached. Of course, work has now come to a standstill as we go through the planning process."

"But fingers crossed we will get the green light as it will make a huge difference."

Fundraising

Robinson says he expected the majority of the work to be paid for by members holding fundraising events. But the club is also looking into other revenue streams.

"We are always on the lookout for ways to generate money for the club," he added.

"We'll be putting on fundraising events and we're confident members will be able to raise the money we need. We will also look at seeing if we can apply for funds from relevant sporting bodies."

Sport

SPORTS DESK 01902 319531

Side KO-ed as the team falls short

HALESOWEN CC crashed out of the National KO at the first attempt against local rivals Wolverhampton CC.

Batting first after winning the toss Wolves totalled 228 in their 45 overs.

In reply Halesowen fell short after being dismissed for 162 losing by 54 runs.

Captain Richard Brooker Said: "It was a tough day getting players available with lots of competing activities at this time of the year and we will need to put stronger teams out if we are to be consistent this season starting with this Saturday at Coventry."

Capitalise

"So far I have been pretty pleased with the form of the bowlers but we will need to make sure we manage our middle well this season in order to capitalise on various game situations."

"We are looking forward to getting in to the League on Saturday."

In other matches the 3rd XI defeated Kidderminster by 5 wickets chasing 135 (C Greening 5-45) with H Evans (51) and H Akram (32) the leading run scorers.

The 4th XI saw off Five Ways Old Edwardians CC by 57 runs thanks to 50s from Al Farrar (71) and Matt Slater (50).

This week the club returns to Birmingham League action with games as follows on Saturday.

1st XI 12:00 Coventry & North Warwickshire CC - 1st XI (A)

2nd XI 12:30 Shifnal CC - 2nd XI Seth Somers Park

3rd XI 13:00 West Malvern CC - 1st XI (A)

4th XI 13:00 Astwood Bank CC - 4th XI Earls High School

Double header as Heathens look to make comeback

CRADLEY are part of a Bank Holiday double header when they race at Wolverhampton on Monday.

The Heathens face league newcomers Lakeside Hammers, managed by former England skipper Kelvin Tatum, looking to hit back from their defeat against Mildenhall.

It will take place immediately after Wolverhampton's SGB Premiership encounter with King's Lynn, which gets underway at 6pm.

Admission for both meetings is available for the standard Wolves admission price, whilst Cradley season ticket holders can pay a £5 supplement to allow them to watch both meetings.

A turnstile for those wanting just to watch the Heathens' meeting will be open from approximately 7.15pm.

The Heathens will also be producing their own programme containing race cards for both meetings.

Cradley boss Will Pottinger is keen to see his side bounce back from the defeat against Mildenhall. They head to Eastbourne on Saturday before returning to Monmore on Monday.

Said Pottinger: "It certainly won't be easy because they've got some big hitters, and riders."

Confident start but trying times

OLD Hales first team travelled to Lichfield for their final league game of the season. The visitors started confidently but after nine minutes the Lichfield backs broke the line early for a score.

Hales came back with some dominant scrum-maging. Luke Smith got on the end of a Chris Hooper pass to sprint for the line for try, converted by Briggs.

Lichfield came back immediately with two quick tries to lead 21-7 after 30 minutes. Another scrum won for Hales, Robinson split the defence to feed wing Jay Reid for a well worked try in the corner, converted by Briggs 21-14.

Rugby

Lichfield were dangerous from the restart, the backs again breaching the Hales defence to extend their lead to 26-14. Hales pulled back to 26-21. Hales were disrupted with changes and could not get momentum, Lichfield capitalised with two quick tries 38-21.

Lichfield again came back with a try 42-26. Hooper had left the field for treatment but returned to score an individual try converted by Briggs 48-33. However the final score came from a mishandle and the Lichfield full back too fast

for the covering defence to score for a finish to the season for Hales in 8th position in the league.

Second team - Old Halesonians 2nds 28 - 15 Dudley Kingswinford 2nds: Old Hales started positively but couldn't break through the DK defence. Hales then suffered some defensive frailties and DK broke through to score an unconverted try.

Hales fought back and started to get the upper hand. The home side play became disjointed and DK gained confidence. A tense period followed for Old Hales until Luke Fenton intercepted a DK pass and raced 40 metres to score under the posts. Fenton made it four conversions out of four.

Yeltz fail to secure win in last match

Halesowen Town 1 Rushall Olympic 2

RUSHALL recorded their first win in 10 games with just local pride at stake in the final game of the season.

The Yeltz started in enterprising mode with early snapshots from former Pics' man Mo Diop and Ben Clarke. But the visitors broke up field from Danny Bragoli's free-kick to snatch a 15th minute lead when lively Stan Mugisha shrugged off his last marker to slot past goalkeeper Dan Platt. The visitors - with six ex-Yeltz players in their squad - went close again when Lewis Probert crashed a 17th minute shot into the side-netting.

Halesowen responded as both Nathan Walker and Lee Chilton struck free-kicks just wide.

The Pics then squandered a 40th minute chance to double their lead when former Yeltz midfielder Aaron Forde squared the ball for Mickael Partodikomo to balloon over the bar from just six yards out after Partodikomo had originally started the counter-attack.

Halesowen's Andre Johnson punished the Pics profligacy by levelling in the final minute of the first half with a fine finish past keeper Jose Veiga to claim Halesowen's first goal in six outings. The Pics soon regained their lead with a 69th minute winner after Partodikomo laid the ball off for Bannister to drill home from the edge of the area.

Halesowen Town 0 Nantwich Town 0

Fifth place Nantwich booked their play off place but couldn't break the stalemate at the Grove last Thursday night. The visitors dominated play and threatened through captain Sam Hall.

The shot-shy Yeltz haven't scored for five games and hardly troubled the visitors.

Steve Jones finally found space in the home area in the 75th minute but Platt made a fine save and a minute later Rob Taylor cleared off the line.

Jones out at 'Pool after just 17 games

FORMER Wolves boss Dave Jones has left his role as League Two Hartlepool manager by mutual consent.

They are on the verge of dropping out of the Football League for the first time since 1921 as they sit two points off safety with two games to play. Defender Matthew Bates takes over from Jones.

Saturday's 2-0 loss to Barnet was the final straw and led to club president Jeff Stelling resigning after an extraordinary rant on Sky Sports' Soccer Saturday in which he blasted Bridgnorth-based Jones: "For God's sake for the good of the club walk now. Go now. You've got 13 points from 51."



Stourbridge striker Luke Benbow goes for goal in the extra-time win over Workington

Cyclist Jack close to two stage wins

CYCLIST Jack Stanton-Warren put in the ride of his career at the Tour of the North International three-day race in Northern Ireland over the Easter holiday.

Stanton-Warren finished in eighth overall and came close to two stage wins.

The 22-year-old, who rides for

the Halesowen Cycling Academy finished third and fifth on stages and came close to winning the white jersey awarded to best under-23 rider.

The Halesowen Cycling Academy fielded four riders in this tough event, which included teams from Scotland and France as well as Ireland and Britain,

and was run over three hilly road race stages of 70 miles, all of which started and finished in the town of Ballymena.

A fifth of the field of 130 dropped out, but the team's other Ludlow rider, Patrick Fotheringham, completed the course in spite of being below his best being on antibiotics.

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